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ABSTRACT

This book explores some of the underlying issues related to the changes taking place in British higher education. Individual chapters focus on the development of higher education in Britain, the various purposes it serves, how to assess it, and how to improve delivery. Part 1 addresses the dilemmas of mass higher education, and traces the development of higher education, the origins of modern universities, the British university system in the twentieth century, and other recent developments. Chapters in Part 2 review the academic standards and quality management debate in British higher education; the factors, such as expansion, diversity, and quality management, that impact on academic standards; and the British external examiner system. Also included is a critical essay on self-assessment and the quality assessment process. Part 3 discusses teaching in higher education, taking note of some the inherent problems, such as establishing contact between teacher and student, the implicit contract between teacher and student, the opportunity for students to consult with teachers, and the link between learning and teaching and the evaluation of outcome. Part 4 notes the views of the various interested parties to higher education, the higher education agenda, and notes what works in higher education. (Contains approximately 120 references.) (CH)

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John Radford, Kjell Raaheim,
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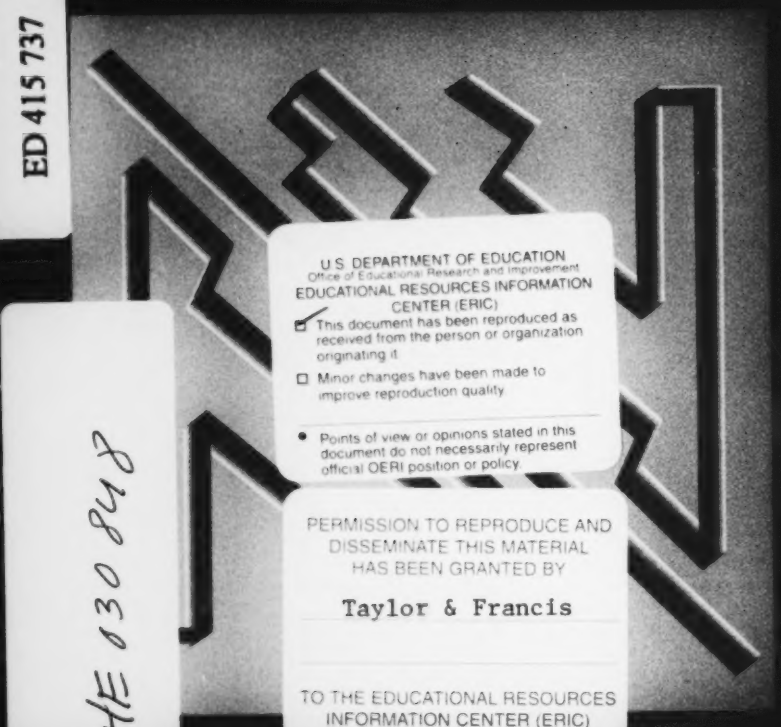

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Quantity and Quality in Higher Education

John Radford, Kjell Raaheim, Ruth Williams and Peter de Vries

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Introduction

Few schoolboys, perhaps, now know that Macaulay's *History of England* is actually a history of the period, roughly from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to near his own day, during which the nation rose dramatically to world status, embarking on an unprecedented, if short lived, period of wealth and power. He tells how, during this period,

> '...the authority of law and the security of property were found to be compatible with a liberty of discussion and of individual action never before known; how, from the auspicious union of order and freedom, sprang a prosperity of which the annals of human affairs had furnished no example; how our country, from a state of ignominious vassalage, rapidly rose to the place of umpire among European powers; how her opulence and her martial glory grew together; how, by wise and resolute good faith, was gradually established a public credit fruitful of marvels which to the statesmen of any former age would have seemed incredible; how a gigantic commerce gave birth to a maritime power, compared with which every other maritime power, ancient or modern, sinks into insignificance.' (Macaulay 1848–1861)

And a good deal more in the same magnificent style. What he did not point out was that this was the very period at which the English system of higher education, consisting almost wholly, as it had for many centuries, of the two universities of Oxford and Cambridge, reached perhaps its lowest ebb. The rigour and application of mediaeval learning had largely gone, and even two of the 'higher' faculties, law and medicine, had to a great extent transferred elsewhere, while the one remaining, theology, was confined to the Church of England, itself rapidly losing its role as a single national faith. In Scottish universities, a new vigour had been inspired by the Enlightenment, but this had not been the case in England. Lord Eldon, subsequently Lord Chancellor, told, perhaps not entirely accurately, how he came to

graduate in 1770. 'I was examined,' he said, 'in Hebrew and in History. What is the Hebrew for the place of a skull? – I replied, Golgotha. Who founded University College? – I replied (though the point is sometimes doubted) that King Alfred founded it. – Very well, sir, said the examiner; you are competent to take your degree' (Mallet 1924).

It is now more or less unquestioned, however, that national prosperity depends upon having a successful system of higher education. It is manifestly the case that such systems everywhere are expanding enormously, and it is clear that the sheer numbers and the resulting cost are causing major problems. In this book, we do not argue the case for or against expansion, nor those for or against various solutions. Rather we try to discuss some of the underlying issues. Some of these are related to the development of higher education, some to the various purposes it may serve, others to how it may be assessed and how its delivery may be improved, particularly in relation to the growth trends which seem certain to continue: issues, in short, of quality and quantity. In Part 1 some of the possible meanings of these terms are considered, and an outline is presented of the historical context of higher education, at least in the Western world. Part 2 addresses issues of academic standards and assessment. Part 3 is concerned with effective teaching in an expanding system. Part 4 considers the views of various interested parties as to the desirable nature of higher education, the purposes it can or should serve, and the bases on which better education may be founded.

Reviewers are fond of remarking that they do not understand 'for whom this book has been written'. For my part, I should like to think that the present authors have had in mind everyone with a serious interest in the future of higher education, but perhaps especially those entering it as academic staff. It seems to me of importance that they understand something of the context within which they wish to pursue a career. It may help to retain some stability amid the welter of conflicting demands and changing fads and fashions. It may help a little in developing some personal philosophy about higher education, rather than assuming (as I think many have traditionally done) that an academic career is simply a chance to pursue academic interests. Some time ago I gave a talk to a group of research postgraduates

mostly intending an academic career, about the development of the academic profession (Radford 1994). I was struck, though on reflection not surprised, by how little was known of this. Several were kind enough to express appreciation for gaining some insight into it. The present authors hope that we may here serve a similar purpose.

John Radford
London, 1996

PART I

The Changing Purposes of Higher Education

Chapter 1

The Changing Purposes of Higher Education

John Radford

The dilemmas of mass higher education

> If you are a real scholar you are thrust out in the cold. Unless you are a money-maker, I say, you will be considered a fool, a pauper. The lucrative arts, such as law and medicine, are now in vogue, and only those things are pursued which have a cash value.
>
> *John of Salisbury, d. 1180*

The value of what is done in higher education, and the scope of its endeavours – quality and quantity, as we have termed them here – are inextricably linked with conceptions of its purpose. More than eight centuries later, John of Salisbury's lament is indeed familiar, but it is far from the only one. Smyth (1995) remarks, 'it is so obvious it hardly even deserves a mention: higher education around the world is undergoing massive and unprecedented changes'. Titles such as *The Crisis of the University* (Scott 1984), or *Transforming Higher Education* (Harvey and Knight 1996) have been proliferating for some time. In fact universities have always been changing, although at times rather slowly. And academics have usually been analysing the situation, trying to discover what they ought to be about, and not infrequently regretting the passing of a golden age – sometimes justifiably. Amid the welter of current analysis certain points seem to occur very often. One is that higher education has recently expanded dramatically, and is likely to go on doing so. Another is that this is inevitable or desirable or (usually)

both. The expansion has been both geographic and demographic: more countries have instituted higher education, and a greater proportion of the population are taking it up – and especially more women, to the point that in advanced countries they have outnumbered men for several decades, although in the UK more women than men entered higher education for the first time only in 1993. It is on the UK, and even on England, that I shall mainly focus, though many of the issues are world-wide. In the 1860s university students in Britain were less than 0.5 per cent of the 18+ age group (less than a quarter of the German equivalent); by the 1960s they were still only 4.5 per cent; by the 1970s (including polytechnics) around 15 per cent, and in the 1990s about 30 per cent, which is the official government target. I have not been able to discover any particular reason for this target. Generally expansion is felt to be desirable for economic reasons. Thus Patrick Coldstream, Director of the Council for Industry and Higher Education, writes: 'The supply of educated people is critical to the UK's future vitality and prosperity. We are well behind our international competitors' (Pearson *et al.* 1990). Sir Claus Moser stated in 1990 that Britain was, 'in danger of becoming one of the least educated of all the advanced nations, with serious consequences for our future, socially, economically and culturally', and in 1996 felt this judgement still stood (*The Times*, 18 April 1996). A survey of top managers for the Price Waterhouse Corporate Register found that only 13% had a degree (Margaret Coles, *The Sunday Times*, 14 January 1996). On the other hand, a survey for the National Advisory Committee for Education and Training Targets found that the proportion of the workforce educated to degree level was, at 23.4%, higher than that in Germany, Taiwan, France, Australia and Korea, though below the USA and Japan (Simon Targett, *The Times Higher Higher Education Supplement*, 7 June 1996). Whatever the figures, there is an increasing *demand* for higher education, as a recent MORI survey confirms (*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 25 April 1997). More and more people see it as the route to a better future. The limits to this demand are not known. However, the current position in the UK is that there are 1.6 million students in 115 universities and 69 higher education colleges. This total is predicted to grow to over 2 million by 2003, as a consequence of more 18-year-olds, an expanding

middle class, and an increase in non-traditional recruitment such as part-time and mature students (Simon Targett, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2 August 1996).

Another generally agreed point is that the expansion cannot be wholly and directly funded by government. The most widely accepted notion is probably that students themselves will have to pay more, although precisely how is unsettled. At the moment of writing (June 1996) the Governors of the London School of Economics have just taken the decision to charge fees directly to students (later rescinded). It should be remembered that not doing so is historically most unusual. Most higher education has involved 'pay as you learn'. But, whatever the sources of funding, it is most unlikely to match the levels that were enjoyed previously, for a short time, in the UK. More students are going to be taught with markedly reduced resources – especially academic staff – per head. At the same time, ostensibly and to some extent actually in the interests of maintaining 'quality', there is a sharply increasing insistence on both central control and public accountability. These of course are not the same thing, but often seem to be treated as if they were.

During the 1960s expansion consequent on the Robbins Report (1963), there was much use of the phrase 'more means worse'. Currently some are maintaining that 'more means different' (Ball 1990). But there is still the question of what 'different' might mean. As Scott (1993) puts it: 'The present moment in Britain may be recalled as the time when a still inward-looking system of higher education was irreversibly opened up, rather as America's was between 1945 and 1970, to the immeasurable benefit of all; or as the time when the ill-defined but deeply-etched "quality" of British universities and colleges was lost as irreversibly'.

The questions seem, then, largely to be those of quantity and quality and the relationship between them. Neither of these terms is unambiguous. To begin with, any increase in numbers, up to 100%, implies a sampling of the population. This sampling is neither random nor homogeneous. Most obviously, and deliberately, it depends on certain sorts of ability, conventionally in the UK indicated by GCE A-levels. These are in fact far from a foolproof indicator of university performance, just as degree results are a very imperfect indicator of future achievement. There are two obvious reasons. One is that individual progress

is often not a straight line – all sorts of personal factors can intrude from time to time to impede, or enhance, performance. The other is that the demands of the different levels, and the skills needed to meet them, are not the same. Academics traditionally complain that students do not know how to work at university level, and employers that they cannot take on a practical job. A major reason in each case is simply that they have been trained to do something different. Successful university entrants, that is high-scoring A-level students, have to a large extent been taught to pass examinations, in most of which there are fairly constrained right answers. Many university courses have had, or still have, the explicit or implicit aim of preparing future researchers, which does not correspond to what new students are prepared for, nor to what either they or future employers want. These mismatches are amenable to remedy, and many institutions do now, if belatedly, attempt to deal with them. The former polytechnics can claim some pioneering credit here. To the extent that students are actually selected by ability, then more must in a literal sense mean worse. If the half of one per cent in the last century had been selected by intellectual ability alone, which of course they largely were not, the universities would have been packed with geniuses. Their students would have had IQs of around 150 or above. (Of course genius is not made up solely of testable intelligence, but of many other factors such as creativity and motivation.) As it was, they did attract a large number of the most able, drawn by the focus of intellectual activity, as well as others 'there for the beer', or the claret and port. It was always possible for clever poor boys to make their way educationally, if with a struggle. However, 30 per cent must include substantial numbers of the less able. Roughly speaking, it will take in those of IQ around 115, which approximately corresponds to the mean of freshmen in American four year colleges, not all of whom will graduate. Of course A-levels are not direct measures of intelligence; they are simply the cheapest way of choosing. If we were serious about selection, we would devise proper psychometric assessment procedures (naturally, more effective than the failure described by Kjell Raaheim in Part 3), including intelligence as one factor, validated against student performance at university and later. This approach proved to be highly successful, as it always does,

when it was only partially used in the department of which I was head from 1965 onwards. It would, incidentally, avoid the annual 'scramble for places' after the A-level results; this doesn't occur in other countries, for example Portugal, which use some kind of aptitude test at an earlier stage. (For those worried about 'intelligence', I use it here in the original technical psychometric sense of a core set of intellectual capabilities.)

There is still a prevailing myth that the most able students will achieve their potential without any great assistance; it doesn't matter if they are poorly taught (indeed, I have quoted elsewhere a lecturer of mine who actually said that teaching should not be too good, as it would obscure the natural distinction between the more and less talented). This myth, it should not be necessary to say, is wholly false. Every student requires, and benefits most from, the *appropriate* teaching. There is, in principle, an ideal set of circumstances to maximise the potential of each individual. What a wider intake of ability does mean, is that attention has to be paid to a wider range of teaching.

Sampling is not random either in respect of socio-economic status. The more able, and the higher achieving at A-level, tend to come from better-off, better educated homes, which also give them a greater expectation of entering higher education and more financial support when there. Even the Open University, intended among other things to make higher education available to those without such advantages, has in fact attracted a large proportion of its students from the already 'educated' classes. Current financial pressures, which are almost certain to increase, will exacerbate this. Some institutions have deliberately tried to offset it by, for example, selecting on grounds other than academic, or by specially tailored 'access' courses. This will not work well if it is then assumed that those entering by such routes are simply equivalent to the remainder. When entry was highly selective, there was undoubtedly a pool of able students who 'missed the boat' at A-level, but later did very well at degree work through exceptional entry. At 30 per cent, this pool must be much smaller, if it exists at all. Students who have failed to get minimum entry qualifications by the usual routes are likely to be less academically able than those who have, although there will be some who have simply lacked the opportunity to do so.

To the extent that opportunity is equalised, performance will reflect ability; on a level playing field, the better players will win.

Quality is even more problematic. To begin with there sometimes seems to be a confusion between 'quality' meaning simply a characteristic or trait, with no necessary implication of evaluation, and 'quality' meaning something desirable or excellent. For those of a religious bent, education lacking the 'quality' of a spiritual dimension, and indeed often a strict doctrinal one, could not be excellent, however technically proficient the teachers or ample the resources. In such cases, the values are explicit, but often in education they are implicit. The 'ill-defined quality' of British higher education referred to by Scott probably includes several components, such as the excellence of the best work, a particular rather personal mode of teaching, and some form of communal and corporate life ('collegiality' is the current buzz-word). It may also imply the studying of certain subjects and not others. There is an ambiguity about the expression 'higher education' itself. One sense is chronological, equivalent to 'tertiary', the stage after primary and secondary. But at that level, if not before, education diversifies into channels that are seen as 'higher' or 'lower' in some other sense. Precisely what that sense is, is by no means clear, but it clearly interacts with what is to count as 'quality'. Sometimes the sense seems to refer to the most advanced work in a particular discipline; sometimes it is implied that only some areas of work can be 'higher'. Currently in the UK there is for the first time a centrally directed effort to assess the 'quality' of university work, in both research and teaching. Various possible meanings of 'quality' have been mooted. One line is that of exceptionality. This does not necessarily imply homogeneity within an institution. A university could be considered excellent if the level attained by its top students (or teachers) was outstanding, even if they were few in relation to the whole. Oxford and Cambridge have traditionally been regarded as excellent, but they have never supposed that all their graduates are of equal merit. On the contrary, a great deal of effort is put into arranging them in qualitatively distinct classes – although to the outside world an Oxbridge degree is often more valuable than any other. Holders are consistently preferred by employers (as a recent survey re-confirms – *The Times*, 20 August 1996). However, even this apparently simple

criterion is capable of variations: it would be possible to base it on the ultimate level of the best, or on the total number attaining some very high level, or on the proportion of the total doing so. How many Fellows of the Royal Society would equal one Nobel prizewinner? (Statistically, about 12.)

Such an avowedly elite approach may be unacceptable to those whose priority is equality, and another approach to 'quality' is that of a general level of competence attainable by all. In the case of a university, this means all students entering. Even at 30 per cent, they are way above the average for the population as a whole. 'Quality' would presumably mean that all or nearly all students graduated satisfactorily, even if none were outstanding. It is this line that leads to the 'more means worse' argument, it being supposed that standards must be progressively lowered to avoid failures. A quite different sense again is that of value for money, for example return on investment such as increased numbers of graduates (at the same formal level) for the same or less funding. Yet another sense is that of 'value added'. Quality consists of the amount of progress made by students regardless of their starting point. Taken to an extreme, this would mean that a university that taught illiterate students to read and write (and some of us have done!) would be equivalent or superior to one that took in those with four top grade A-levels and turned out research scientists. Another criterion might be innovation and development in teaching and learning. In practice, when the word 'quality' is used in relation to higher education, probably most often some combination of all these meanings is implied, with an assumption that they must somehow be balanced one against another.

As it happens, currently the Higher Education Funding Councils in the UK, the government-authorised bodies to whom the function of assessing quality has been given, have adopted yet a further approach, namely that of 'fitness for purpose'. This raises the question of what the purpose of a university is or should be. The question has been answered in the present case by leaving it to be defined by the individual institution. Unfortunately this decision, presumably made to dodge a difficult question and avoid argument, renders assessment more or less impossible, and certainly precludes comparison between institutions or the establishment of common standards. For it is

obviously easier to fulfil a lower aim than a higher one. This elementary difficulty has long been recognised in such qualitative sports as diving, which adopts a tariff system so that the more difficult feat carries more points, which of course are multiplied by marks given for the success with which the dive has been performed. It would not, in theory, be impossible to apply such a method to education, but what has actually been done, to date, has been devoid of the least suggestion of systematic method or knowledge of techniques of assessment. On a personal note, having observed the procedure at first hand, I felt like a physician entering a hospital and finding that no one was using antiseptics or even had the slightest idea what they were. The rather English method has been adopted of ignoring anything on paper and doing what we have always done. Insofar as it rests upon any foundation at all, this seems to be an unspoken assumption that it is only some things that 'count'. These tend to be the traditional, still Oxbridge-inspired, values (which, as we shall see, are actually only one of many possible ways of doing things). It is no surprise that, so far, the 'old' universities are scoring more highly on teaching than the former polytechnics, despite the latters' long-standing interest, and success, in improving and innovating in teaching. It is in fact quite straightforward to devise valid and reliable methods of assessment; it is done routinely in industry where efficiency counts; but this knowledge, admittedly developed only in the last 150 years, has yet, it seems, to filter through to the Department for Education and Employment. These matters are pursued in Part 2.

The views of various interested parties as to what the purpose of universities should be will be discussed later. It may be noted here that even in the UK these institutions are quite heterogeneous. The duopoly of Oxford and Cambridge came to an end 150 years ago. Even then it held only for England and Wales, not Scotland or Ireland. The 100-plus universities in the United Kingdom vary in almost every conceivable way: age, origin, prestige, funding, balance of teaching and research, specialisations, mode of attendance, governance, type of student (ability, gender, nationality, interests etc). Even the formal legal basis is of three different types, a royal charter, statute or registration under the Companies Act. Yet there is still some lingering notion

that somehow or other universities are, or at any rate should be, equivalent if not homogeneous. Prestigious writers such as Mary Warnock can be found railing against the granting of university status to the former polytechnics (by statute) – 'or, more accurately, the decision to call the polytechnics universities' – and increasing use of the title 'professor' (*The Times Higher*, 14 July 1995). She thinks that the most serious danger of this is, 'to genuine academic education, and with it, indissolubly linked, to research'. This link is in fact far from indissoluble, and is in any case of quite recent origin; and 'genuine academic education' has by no means always been the ideal, and its claims can be seriously questioned. Some historical perspective may be valuable; it is too often ignored.

The development of higher education

All advanced societies that we know of have had some more or less formal system equivalent to what we call higher education. The more or less explicit purpose has usually been to prepare future leaders of society, though not necessarily of the same type. Thus the Confucian training of the mandarin class in Imperial China produced primarily administrators, imbued with philosophical values that emphasised stability, central control and loyalty to the governing system, values still seen in the very different political system of today. Hindu *gurukulas* and Buddhist *viharas* in traditional India turned out religious and moral leaders, priests and monks. The two systems that are particularly relevant to the development of 'our' universities, partly because of their direct influence, are those of early Islam and classical Greece. As is well known, the rise of Islam in the eighth and ninth centuries produced a culture stretching geographically from India to Spain, but remarkably unified through the unique message of the Quran and its equally unique medium, the Arabic language (strictly speaking the Quran cannot be translated). Centres for the study of religious doctrine and law naturally arose. These were based around mosques, which developed not merely as places of worship but as community centres for social support and for interpretation and expression of the law. They also in many cases became repositories of learning, including that of the classical Greek and Roman world

when that went into decline. These centres were not all of the same type, but they can be seen as proto-universities, indeed al-Azhar at Cairo (969) is sometimes called the earliest university. But in general they did not develop into the sort of institutions that we recognise today. There seem to have been several reasons. A growth of scholasticism led to the rejection of non-Islamic learning and of any questioning of basic Muslim beliefs. Legal/doctrinal opinions came to be the concern of paid *muftis* rather than the individual citizen. Sufic mysticism devalued book knowledge. Invasions from both East and West splintered the Islamic world politically and linguistically, and led to the neglect or actual destruction of many of the great libraries. A particular legal principle, the *waqf*, was the basis of the foundation of institutions: it gave to the detailed prescription of a founder the force of law (indefinitely) thus inhibiting change and development, in contrast to the autonomous, self-renewing character of many mediaeval institutions including universities. Those universities inherited much from Islam, especially by way of knowledge and learning, but also such appurtenances as black academic robes, a distinction between undergraduate and graduate studies, and the method of disputations.

In our own time, new Islamic universities have been created, embracing modern learning but within a religious framework. For some, indeed, education and spirituality are indissoluble; otherwise what is done is mere training. For believers, this means Islam since that is the one true faith. The Islamic University in Uganda, for example, teaches general subjects, but 'through the rubric of faith'. Students need not necessarily be Muslims, but, 'the promotion and protection of Islam and the Islamic culture are the mainstays of the university' (Professor Mahdi Adamu, Vice Chancellor, reported in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, June 21 1996). Other authoritative statements are stronger: for example, 'we cannot have a philosophy or an educational policy which is based on a concept not identical with the Islamic'. This means accepting two sources of knowledge, divine (Muslim) revelation and the human intellect and its tools, with the first always taking priority in case of conflict (al-Attas 1979). Of course there are also Christian and communist universities based on similar assumptions.

The greatest outside influence on modern Western education by far, however, has of course been classical Greece – although not necessarily in the most obvious ways. It would be interesting to find out what is the general public perception of 'the Greeks'. One might guess that several factors conspire to produce an image of a society much more like our own than in fact it was. Despite the general decline of the classics in schools, the literature is widely read, and drama staged, in contemporary translations; museums and archaeological sites attract hordes of visitors; and at a more sophisticated level the great philosophers have always been, so to say, major players in the game. These modern experiences conceal a still half-savage society which nevertheless generated many aspects of what we call civilisation. There are parallels with the way our own culture has developed, in the emergence of democracy out of feudalism, the relative decline of religion and magic and rise of science, and the growth of high culture in the arts out of traditional folk crafts and practices. In the 19th century in particular, the aims of English higher education came in certain respects to resemble significantly those of the Greeks, and traces of this still remain. (A writer in *The Times*, 26 July 1996, Anthony Garrett, can remark: 'Every university is a descendant of Plato's Academy, in having a brief to ask questions of the world and to seek to answer them', though this link is actually quite tenuous.) Nineteenth century Oxbridge was untypical, and the parallels should not be pushed too far. The general aim of Greek education was the production of citizens able to play their part in the civic community. The community was that of the city state – small, independent, warlike, in daily life very far from the grave and frozen images of Victorian painters such as Leighton and Alma-Tadema. Citizens, of course, meant free men, always a minority of the population – not women, foreigners or slaves. These citizens, originating in the ordinary subjects of kingly rule, became heirs to the aristocratic tradition of pre-classical times. As democracy broadened, more wanted to be 'the best'. Traditionally, aristocracy rested on the quality of 'virtue', inherited but also related to wealth, especially in the form of more and better land (always at a premium in a region of mountains and islands). Educators were divided as to the extent to which virtue could be taught, but perhaps more generally agreed that it could

be developed; it was a kind of potential. Broadly there were two main approaches to (higher) education. The better known is that of Plato (*c*.428–347 BC), whose philosophical prestige and literary skill have made his model seem characteristic of Greece. It was in fact largely based, not on Athens but on Sparta, a most unusual society which was always of the form of an occupying military power. As is well known, Plato advocated a highly disciplined, highly selective education, through which the final virtuous elite would become suitable governors of society, the 'guardians'. The supreme educational value was reason, which enables us to penetrate to the reality behind the changing world of appearances. Although Plato was an active educator, founder of a teaching institution which survived in some form until all philosophy at Athens was forbidden by the Emperor Justinian in 529, a Platonic society has never existed. More typical of actual Greek education was the approach of the sophists, who were professional trainers in the practical skills of citizenship. Because so much of Greek public life, especially in Athens, consisted of debate and argument, not just informally but in every political decision (large and small) and every legal wrangle in which the individual could, and in many cases had to, take part (there were no professional lawyers and hardly any professional politicians in our sense), the most important skill was that of persuasive communication or rhetoric. Rhetoric was the systematic development of the non-violent ways of influencing others, originating, no doubt, in tribal gatherings and feudal councils, and was the core of Greek higher education and culture. It far outlived them, finding a role as one of the seven components of the foundation arts course in mediaeval education (the others were likewise derived from elements of sophistic teaching), and retaining a place in universities at least until the end of the 18th century; Harvard still has a Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory; and a recent American book advising engineers how to communicate to others is subtitled *A Rhetorical Education*. What the sophists (and Plato) did not teach were what we should consider 'the professions'. Neither lawyers nor a paid clergy existed; medicine was a craft or mystery handed down from master to student, sometimes in a religious context. Other professions developed, including athletes and their trainers, but specialisation was not the preferred model.

The sophistic ideal is described by Isocrates (436–338 BC):

> Whom, then, do I call educated, since I exclude the arts and sciences and specialities? First, those who manage well the circumstances which they encounter day by day, and who possess a judgement which is accurate in meeting occasions as they arise and rarely misses the expedient course of action; next, those who are decent and honourable in their intercourse with all with whom they associate, tolerating easily and good-naturedly what is unpleasant or offensive in others and being themselves as agreeable and reasonable to their associates as it is possible to be; furthermore, those who hold their pleasures always under control and are not unduly overcome by their misfortunes, bearing up under them bravely and in a manner worthy of our common nature; finally, and most important of all, those who are not spoiled by successes and do not desert their true selves and become arrogant, but hold their ground steadfastly as intelligent men, not rejoicing in the good things which have come to them through chance rather than in those which through their own nature and intelligence are theirs from birth. Those who have a character which is in accord, not with one of these things, but with all of them – these, I contend, are wise and complete men, possessed of all the virtues (from Beck 1964).

Apart from the reference to birth, this is almost identical with Kipling's 'If', and some traditional ideals of British education – at least as seen in the public schools and universities of the last two centuries or so – do seem to find their origin here. One is the rejection of professional training in favour of general education, an education broadly cultural rather than technical; another is the emphasis on moral as well as intellectual development and on qualities of character. Isocrates did not believe that all could become virtuous: 'Nevertheless I do think that the study of political discourse can help more than any other thing to stimulate and form such [desirable] qualities of character'. Teaching was highly personal, master to student, and largely oral rather than written, a tradition going back to aristocratic education with its legendary origin in the wise centaur, Cheiron.

Political power passed away from Athens to the empires of Alexander and then Rome, but its prestige as a cultural centre

remained for many centuries, as did that of Greek education. The early centuries AD saw the establishment of formal organisations of higher education that some have called universities, with established professors (rather handsomely paid and sometimes even exempt from taxes!), permanent lecture halls and regular bodies of students drawn from all over the multiracial empire, at Rome itself and at Athens, at Smyrna, Berytus, Tarsus, Antioch, Ephesus and Alexandria. Familiarity with Greek culture was essential to civilised life, and a grasp of the sophistic skills, above all rhetoric, by now a highly complex and formalised art, to success in the law courts, politics or administration. The rise of Christianity led to the suppression of the ancient teaching and culture, but court and business life, and the education of those involved, continued under the Byzantine regime until that too disappeared at last in 1453. When it did, of course, some of its store of learning passed to the revivified West. Rome had fallen to the barbarians in 410, and it is common to think of the next two centuries as the Dark Ages. In fact, civic life never completely died out in Italy and elsewhere. The Church was for long hostile to pagan learning; Gregory the Great severely reprimanded the Bishop of Vienne for his 'execrable' behaviour in teaching grammar. But 'grammar', Latin language and literature, became indispensable to the administration of Christendom, and schools began to be established, often centred on the great cathedrals. The regrowth of urban life and an advanced culture produced a need for specialised professionals, especially in law, medicine, theology and teaching. Indeed the first university in the modern sense is sometimes held to have been the medical school at Salerno in Sicily, which probably existed in some form from the eighth century. But it lacked several of the features that came to characterise universities, although it lingered on until finally closed by Napoleon.

Universities developed out of the concentrations of scholars and students that arose partly by chance and partly from particular needs, first at Bologna, then Paris and Oxford. That they were able do to so is itself the result of a number of particular factors. One is the characteristic mediaeval distinction between Church and state. Unlike Islam, in which there is one law for a unified society, and in which religious and civil laws and obligations are the same, the Christian Church was always a parallel

organisation, seeking to influence the civil power but not identical with it. This was formalised by Pope Gelasius II in 494 with his doctrine of the 'two swords', civil and canon law, both binding on the faithful. Universities grew up, so to speak, in the gap between the two, although both powers strenuously tried to exert control over the scholars, often successfully. Oxford came formally into existence in 1214 when a dispute over the town authorities hanging two students was resolved by the papal legate, Nicholas de Romanis, who gave the Bishop of Lincoln the power to appoint a chancellor to keep things in order. But chancellors came to be part of the university structure, a sort of chief executive, and eventually to delegate their powers to a deputy, which is why brand new British universities in the 1990s have a vice chancellor even if they have no chancellor and no history. The model was an independent one, analogous to the mediaeval guild, a self-perpetuating corporation constituting a congeries of special interests (which is what the word *universitas* implies), including all grades from apprentice up to master. At Bologna it was actually the students who took the lead, administering the university and paying the masters to teach them, on strict conditions. More usually, as at Paris and then Oxford, it was the more permanent body of masters who gained control. Oxford is still formally a congregation of masters.

The mediaeval curriculum was in a sense a combination of the Greek general model with the developing demand for professional training. It began with the arts course, the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic, and the *quadrivium* of music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. The *trivium* in particular was what we might now consider a foundation course in transferable skills. Grammar was Latin language and literature, the *lingua franca* of scholarship, administration and diplomacy and the route to all further learning. Rhetoric was persuasive communication. Dialectic was logic and reasoning. Skills included such things as *dictamen*, which we might call drafting, involving knowledge of law and language, and *disputatio*, putting a reasoned case. Then, for those who persevered, came training in one of the three major professions of law, medicine or theology, which came to be considered the 'higher faculties'. Offering at least one of these, as well as the arts course, was one of the marks of the mediaeval university. The others were: attracting students

from a wide area, not just locally (a *studium generale*); acceptability for beneficed clergy to attend without losing their income; and recognition of the graduates as permitted to teach in any other university (*ius ubique docendi*). Mediaeval students were not, on the whole, aristocratic. They were what we might now call 'upwardly mobile', bright lower- to middle-class boys who wanted to better themselves by means of a professional qualification. Many were poor and had to support themselves, sometimes by acting as servants to their better-off peers.

The mediaeval world view is so different to ours that, in contrast to classical society, it is easy to view it as 'primitive' and naive. But as Cobban (1975) remarks:

> The quality of training received at a mediaeval university, the rigorous, exacting nature of the academic courses designed to equip graduates to deal with the empirical and physical problems of living and of society, gave a centre and a unified purpose to university education that is lacking in the present centrifugal academic scene where the mastery of a discipline is commonly sacrificed to a piece-meal interdisciplinary approach leading in no particular direction.

Mediaeval universities, of which by 1300 there were already 16, were moreover flexible institutions. As independent, self-renewing corporations, they could adapt readily to the changing demands of professional training, while retaining continuity in their academic functions. At least from the fifteenth century practical subjects such as business administration and conveyancing were taught at Oxford, although not for a degree. Unlike today's institutions, they had relatively little in the way of administrative apparatus, virtually no student support services and, of course, no huge investment in laboratories. The main physical resource apart from buildings was the library, and even that was small, although costly, when every item was hand-copied. Courses of study became progressively longer, eventually up to nine years for the doctorate, although this included what would today be high school or further education work, with students entering at 14 or 15.

Another difference from the classical world is that whereas in that society aristocratic education was progressively democratised, in Europe it remained largely separate. The ruling classes needed to command, not persuade, and to learn practical and

social skills appropriate to their status. These were such things as arms-training and strategy, hunting, archery and falconry, music and dancing, with some knowledge of book learning, and they were taught in the households of great nobles, often with the sons of other nobility seconded as pages and squires, anticipating in a way the public boarding school tradition. The arts of war, rather than turning into athletics, available to all, as they did in Greece, found their playful expression in jousts and tournaments, highly expensive rituals which lingered on for show into the seventeenth century. Not until the eighteenth century did sport emerge from its folk game origins in a form – cricket – which was shared by all classes, and even then a sharp distinction developed between the paid professional and the gentleman amateur, which persisted until 1962. For upper-class women, household management and social accomplishments were taught at home – and might be the basis of independent careers in what we would now term business or administration, for example as head of an estate or religious house. Only later did young (male) aristocrats infiltrate the universities, as the nature of the latter changed, at least in England.

The origins of modern universities

By the close of the mediaeval period, towards the end of the fifteenth century, there were more than 80 universities in Europe. The fragmentation of Christendom, and the rise of nation states, meant that they subsequently tended to diverge ever more widely in patterns of development. Only some of these can be mentioned here, with the object of showing the origins of some present-day features. In France, for example, the University of Paris was recognised as a 'universitas magistrorum' by 1150; its status was confirmed by a Papal bull in 1215. Subsequent universities were founded mostly by the Church, a few by the sovereign, but even the latter were later confirmed by the Pope – although there were continual campaigns for independence. Everything changed at the Revolution. In 1793 the National Convention abolished all universities. Next year the first of the *grandes écoles*, the Polytechnique, was created, to train military and civil engineers for the service of the state – industry had to wait until 1829 for the École Centrale des Manufactures. In 1806

Napoleon re-created universities as centres of cultural transmission and research, but with little autonomy. It was faculties and schools, specifically of law, medicine, pharmacy, science and letters, that were accorded legal status and financial autonomy, but under the central control of a Grand Master and Council in Paris. There was no transfer of students between the two systems. Later developments included the permission of private institutions (1882), although within the state system and subject to central controls, and the regrouping of schools and faculties into regional universities (1896).

Some of the most important developments took place in Germany, where the oldest university is Heidelberg (1386). The Napoleonic wars closed half the universities. The major influence in their redevelopment, and, indeed, in the development of the modern concept of a university, was Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). As minister for public instruction in the new German confederation, he, 'conceived of the university as an elite institution, a centre of professional training and pure research, based upon the neo-humanist tradition of the Age of Enlightenment' (Knowles 1977). It would not be for strictly practical training or for technical and applied scientific studies, which were relegated to separate institutions: at first trade schools, later upgraded to technical colleges. Even professors of medicine were not allowed to practise. Von Humboldt thought of the various sciences as essentially a whole, unified by philosophy, and the resulting body of knowledge as being at one with general upbringing and universal enlightenment, the system being guaranteed by a framework of 'freedom to learn and freedom to teach'. At this level, teaching and research were likewise a unity; and both teachers and students existed for the sake of learning, not for external ends. The prime exponents of all this were the permanent and powerful professors, and they, and the university-educated officials, clergy and lawyers, prided themselves on the guardianship of a disinterested culture. It is doubtful if the perfect Humboldtian university ever existed in actuality, but the first 'reformed university' was established in Berlin in 1810, and the model has strongly influenced the conception of what a university should be into our own time.

It was a factor in the emergence of what is fast becoming the dominant model, that of the USA. The first new-world univer-

sity seems to have been Santo Domingo in 1538, and an important tradition developed in some of the Latin American countries, where the policy was generally to integrate the various races within the Roman Catholic faith, rather than destroy or reject them as in the north. However, higher education in the English colonies began at Harvard College in 1636, which was established in what was then the Oxford and Cambridge tradition, to train clergymen and political leaders. In the next century several other private institutions were founded, although with the movement for, and achievement of, independence, the purpose and methods began to seem less appropriate. Students objected to the old-fashioned notions of discipline and to the old-world curriculum. This led to a characteristically American institution, the student societies or fraternities, initially as debating and literary clubs of which the first was at Yale in 1753; the first to adopt a 'Greek letter' title was Phi Beta Kappa at William and Mary College in 1776. In some ways, of course, this involved a reversion to the mediaeval tradition of student administration and self-help – like 'working one's way through college', still a feature of American higher education. These universities, however, remained, as they still do, independent, relatively exclusive and high prestige institutions, based on a combination of wealth (some of it fed back by successful alumni), social status, academic merit and, latterly, research excellence. The right of private independent universities to exist was established by a Supreme Court decision in 1819. The importance of education and of general access to it were intrinsic to the conceptions on which the new state was founded, deriving as they did (like von Humboldt's) from the theorists of the Enlightenment. A major step towards this ideal was the establishment of the 'land-grant colleges' of agricultural and mechanical arts, funded by the federal government following the Merrill-Wade Act of 1862. Of course, until very recently large sections of the population were in practice denied access to higher education, but the principle was there.

Jeffersonian democracy emphasised federation and self-reliance, which were manifested in his University of Virginia. Von Humboldt's ideals of freedom to learn and to teach accorded well with this, and the German model also stressed experiment, research, subject expertise and professionalism. The autocratic

professor was replaced eventually, around 1900, by elected chairmen of departments (today, simply 'chairs'). The curriculum, too, changed significantly. Originally it had followed the ancient unitary pattern, but by the 1820s alternatives – 'electives' – began to be offered, an idea perhaps derived from the University of Edinburgh, which could form 'parallel tracks'. Such tracks came to consist of discrete units (courses) each with its own assessment built in. This too accorded with freedom of choice, but was also practical for a growing student body, many of whom could not afford several years of continuous full-time education. Further steps towards mobility and flexibility were to make units equivalent to each other, eventually in terms of the number of hours of instruction, and to introduce continuous assessment. Thus developed the American modular system which is now so taken for granted that it is not even distinguished by a name – although in fact it came to its full form only in second half of the present century. At the same time the debate is by no means over as to whether there should be some 'core curriculum' that all students should take at least in the early stages, deriving partly from a strong religious or moral strain in teaching. The American system in its development has manifested a number of principles. Free choice by students and teachers of what to study and what to teach is one. Another is independence of government control (except for the military academies). A third is flexibility and willingness to meet the needs of society. Fourth, diversification – there are at least 20 broad groups of higher education institution, ranging from the graduate schools (the exemplar was Johns Hopkins in Baltimore) to two year junior or community colleges (from around 1900), from public to private, secular to religious, residential to off-campus and general to highly specialised in terms of curriculum or student intake. A fifth feature is that of self-regulation: standards are maintained neither by central control as in much of Europe, nor by autonomy and peer review, as traditionally in Britain, but by voluntary systems of accreditation and by influential national studies of educational policy.

Different routes were followed in the United Kingdom. Scotland, not united with England until 1707, saw its first university at St Andrews in about 1410. The student body, compared with that in England, in post-mediaeval development retained some

of the earlier characteristics: it was less class-determined, less residential and younger – the present four year degree still reflects this. Scotland had strong links with the continent, especially the 'auld alliance' with France as another traditional enemy of England, and in the eighteenth century Scottish universities saw the effects of the Enlightenment: modern sciences, new departments, specialisations, expert professors, wider intake and larger classes. Many features of the Scottish model were adopted by the founders of the University of London, several of whom, such as Lord Brougham, were Edinburgh graduates. Ireland too was different, with Trinity College Dublin chartered in 1592 as the start of a collegiate university that did not materialise, and with developments constrained, as now, by religious and political divisions.

The dominant influence in British higher education, however, has been, and in many ways still remains, that of the two original English universities. It is largely due to chance that they retained their joint rule for so long. As is well known, Cambridge originated in a migration of Oxford scholars; but repeated efforts to found further universities at Reading, Winchester, Salisbury, Northampton and elsewhere all came to nothing. Whether they might have developed in other ways we cannot say. As it was, profound changes set in during the 16th century, strongly influenced by political developments. Professional training was still the main function, predominantly in law, more especially canon or ecclesiastical law. This profession was liable to come into conflict with the new Tudor regime (1485), particularly after the break with Rome and sequestration of Church assets. The natural sequel was that in 1535 Thomas Cromwell forbade the universities to teach or award degrees in canon law. Law teaching passed to the Inns of Court, the organisations of practising lawyers grouped around the Law Courts, and eventually became entirely civil as canon law faded from general importance. Medical training too began to be centred elsewhere, in professional societies: the Royal College of Physicians in 1518, Barber Surgeons in 1540, Apothecaries in 1617. Many of the great teaching hospitals date from the early eighteenth century. Only theology was left, and the universities remained training colleges for the clergy, now of the Church of England; but new religious movements in the next two centuries destroyed its

universality, and the clergy tended to move upwards socially to be assimilated with the gentry, as the established Church became a part of the state and a kind of social service, rather than a parallel power. The shift of political power from the monarchy to the House of Commons meant a change in the pattern of English government from military aristocracy to an educated elite, at first clerical but increasingly lay.

Mediaeval students had lived normally in halls, self-governing communities uncontrolled by the university. Colleges, in contrast, were endowed institutions, originally for small numbers of advanced scholars. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they began to admit fee-paying students, and gradually took over from or absorbed the old independent halls, becoming controlling bodies akin to the Tudor state itself. Students began to be put in the charge of tutors whose functions were moral and disciplinary and sometimes financial. Regius professors were appointed to control the teaching of politically sensitive subjects. In the 17th century the Chancellor, Archbishop Laud, had new statutes imposed on Oxford, designed to control every aspect of university life in accordance with his own orderly, oligarchic political principles. At this time the new potential of scientific research began to appear; but it passed largely to novel institutions led by the Royal Society (1660). Here too originated the system of peer review, still such a pervading feature of scholarly life. The next century saw the foundation, also outside the universities, of many of the intellectual organisations that are still with us – the British Museum in 1753, the Royal Society of Arts in 1754, the Royal Academy in 1768, and the Royal Institution in 1799. Despite the presence of England's two greatest classical scholars, Bentley and Porson, the 18th century universities could be seen as intellectual backwaters. The immensely learned poet, Thomas Gray, appointed Regius Professor of History in 1768, never quite got around to delivering his inaugural (or any) lecture. Others, often Fellows for life of ancient foundations, lacked even learning. The universities functioned largely, apart from their religious role, as finishing schools for young gentlemen, to whom they imparted, it was hoped, a degree of Christian moral rectitude, public spiritedness, willingness to serve king and country, knowledge of men and affairs, and some intellectual acquirements – history, law

and the classics were particularly appropriate. Subsequently they became officers in the army or navy, members of parliament, diplomats and administrators, entered the Church or ran their estates, or, of course, devoted themselves to patronage of the arts or sport or drinking and gambling.

Nevertheless a determined campaign regained some of the autonomy denied by Laud, and in 1802 the by now perfunctory bachelor's examinations were reformed, including the introduction of the degree class system which still persists, carrying with it an implicit notion of ability coming in qualitatively discrete steps. In the remainder of the century, English higher education underwent ever more radical change. Much of this story is well known, but it is perhaps not always realised how much of it has carried forward into our own time, at least in the form of unspoken assumptions. The almost immemorial duopoly of Oxford and Cambridge was at last broken, but they continued to dominate, as in many ways they still do. Professional and academic training were now quite separate, except for the Church of England, whose position only exacerbated the split: admissions were restricted to Anglicans, and academics were normally expected to take orders. There was a sharpening up and focusing of the ideal of an elite, seen perhaps most clearly in the writings of S.T. Coleridge (1772–1834), and particularly in his notion of the 'clerisy', a superior minority educated through (Anglican) religion and classical literature, forming a spiritually refined and morally dedicated class suited to national leadership and a counter to the brutalising pressures of industrialisation and urbanisation. The advocacy of such a class was taken by some to be equivalent to keeping everyone in their proper station, but Coleridge's aim was the promotion throughout society of those qualities he believed to characterise humanity – essentially, the capacity for moral responsibility and hence for citizenship. His views influenced such educational thinkers and practitioners as Thomas Arnold of Rugby, his son Matthew, J.H. Newman and Charles Kingsley.

Matthew Arnold, an inspector of schools from 1851 to 1881, and Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1855, put as the end of education nothing less than 'perfection', equated with culture, which in turn is not merely or even primarily the pursuit of knowledge, but is essentially a matter of morals, the passionate

desire to do good – 'good' being defined as accord with reason and the will of God (incompatible as these may seem to us). Culture was contrasted with the ever-growing mechanical and material civilisation of the time; Arnold seems to have been the first to use the term 'philistine' in this context. All this was not a recipe for freedom or diversity, but would necessitate a strong state and a universal system of education. Newman's *Idea of a University* (1873) did not exclude practical, vocational or scientific training, but within the context of the general pursuit of knowledge as intellectual development, which he considered the criterion of a liberal education: 'liberal education, viewed in itself, is simply the cultivation of the intellect as such, and its object is nothing more nor less than intellectual excellence'. Newman was, of course, a leader in the Anglo-Catholic Oxford movement, and E.B. Pusey, perhaps its doyen, held that, 'the problem and special work of the University was not to advance science, or to produce works on medicine, jurisprudence, theology or what not, but to form men's minds religiously to discharge whatever duties God in his providence shall appoint to them' (quoted by Oman 1941). Mark Pattison, Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, put it less religiously but equally clearly:

> It is no part of the proper business of the university to be a professional school. Universities are not to fit men for some special mode of gaining a livelihood; their object is not to teach law or divinity, banking or engineering, but to cultivate the mind and form the intelligence. A University should be in possession of all science and all knowledge, but it is as science and knowledge, not as a set of money-bringing pursuits (1876; quoted by Sparrow 1967).

These views are not identical, but they all stress the importance of general moral/religious/intellectual excellence, analogous to, and doubtless partly derived from, the Greek 'virtue'; as opposed to professional or practical skills and training, the original *raison d'être* of universities. A modern graduate of the system, in the shape of the Oxford school of *litterae humaniores*, reported:

> It taught us no trade, it prepared us for no special profession, except perhaps that of the teacher of classics or philosophy, it fitted us for no particular walk of life beyond the classroom and the college lecture room. But it tended to develop in us

> the faculty of judgement. It educated our intellect as such. It sought to make us educated men, not trained technicians, and in the result, though after further training, its recipients could become better doctors, lawyers, statesmen, administrators, theologians (in Parkinson 1953).

The author in fact became Abbot of Downside (Parkinson 1953). The ideal has now narrowed to a primarily intellectual one. 'The faculty of judgement' is almost indistinguishable from the 'critical thinking' which currently comes at the top of most lists of ideals; see Part 4. We can accept that there was much of value here, but also note that not a shred of evidence is offered; and that merely passing through the system is considered sufficient qualification to teach it in turn. And indeed it may be that very experience to which the benefits are due: the experience of regular one-to-one tutorials in which a certain sort of skill is demanded and, at best, taught. The actual content is very likely less important.

The characteristic Oxbridge teacher in fact came to be the college tutor, who retained much of his pastoral role while adding an academic one. Both are seen pre-eminently in the life of Benjamin Jowett (1817–93), Master of Balliol and perhaps the most influential British academic of the century, at least in terms of personal effect on students, many of them later eminent. For him, the prime function of the university was education; and numerous reminiscences evidence a great teacher: 'His criticism...stimulated without discouraging. In setting before the mind a lofty ideal, he implied a belief in powers hereafter to be developed, and the belief seemed to create the thing believed in'. (This is much like what the Russian educationalist, Lev Vygotsky described as the 'zone of proximal development'.) '...But the intellectual stimulus was not all. He seemed to divine one's spiritual needs, and by mere contact and the brightness of his presence, to supply them' (Faber 1957). Not all tutors were excellent, or even adequate, of course, but at its best the tutorial system, again highly reminiscent of the classical Greek method, has been a peculiarly powerful technique; although of course a highly expensive one. Jowett would have had ten or a dozen students at a time, and even as Master rarely allowed a day to pass without seeing two or three of them. Tutors also enjoyed the very short Oxbridge terms (although reading parties were

common in vacations), taught a largely unchanging syllabus and had no modern pressure to publish. From today's perspective, English university life in the days of Jowett or Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) or Oscar Browning seems idyllic and timeless, though in fact change was underway: Fellowships for life came to an end, new subjects gradually came in, and even psychology entered the curriculum before the century closed (1897).

Elsewhere, however, there were increasing demands for wider access to education, particularly in science. George Birkbeck's first lectures for 'mechanics' drew 500 students in 1800, and he and others founded the London Mechanics Institute in 1823 for adult study. At the same time (1825) University College in London became the first successful alternative to the ancient universities, deliberately created without religious restrictions, with low fees and empowered to grant medical degrees. In 1836 it became the first college of the University of London, which was principally an examining body, under whose aegis many other university colleges eventually grew up. Later the University became a federation of largely independent schools and colleges in London. The origins of the large civic universities, for example at Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool, lay in independent foundations, in cities where an increasingly wealthy middle class wanted higher education free of religious ties and social elitism, able to provide technical knowledge for local industry, or professional qualifications plus an element of culture, and was ready in many cases to back the new institutions with handsome philanthropy. Many colleges were founded, and only some survived. But these provided a model of academic self-government which became dominant in the first half of the 20th century, and a new form of higher education in which classics and mathematics at last lost their dominance in favour of arts subjects such as English, history and economics, the physical sciences, technology and professional qualifications.

The twentieth century

By the early twentieth century the United Kingdom possessed a university system which was relatively small and backward in relation to several other countries, notably Germany and the US,

but was nevertheless extremely heterogeneous, ranging from Oxbridge to the provincial university colleges taking London external degrees and successively attaining full autonomy. Indeed those degrees spread some form of university education even wider, for they were also taken by external students on the margins of the system, through technical colleges or private study. Students ranged from the privileged elite of Oxbridge, themselves a mix of everything from idle rich to potential scholars or statesmen (occasionally all combined), to bright working-class lads (few lasses) hoping to better themselves by a night-school degree. Staff ranged from Fellows of ancient colleges to technical college teachers in inner cities. Despite this actual heterogeneity, a number of explicit or implicit assumptions became general about the proper nature of universities and university education. It came to be widely felt that a university was, or should be, a place apart, preferably physically, from the rest of society, enjoying political independence and governed by some form of academic democracy, where staff would pursue scholarship and academic research more or less wherever they might lead. In general, this tended to be a 'pure' rather than an 'applied' direction, despite the British origins of the industrial revolution. Physics and chemistry laboratories were created in both Oxford and Cambridge in the 1870s, but university science tended to be dominated by the 'liberal' ideal. More particularly, no general, graduated system of engineering education was developed, and the successful British engineer tended to remain someone who had trained on the job and risen from the ranks. The idea of research as a prime function of universities, in which students should be trained, was at first slow to develop. The Humboldtian model in Germany had led to a new qualification, the PhD, as a certificate of competence in research. The first British PhDs (actually DPhil, Oxon) were not awarded until 1918, and then largely because the war made it impossible to go to Germany for them. In the next 50 years, however, research came to dominate academic prestige, and to be the overriding factor in promotion.

By mid century, the model for undergraduates was three or four years in residence, taking a single-subject full-time degree course – a pattern which became really dominant after 1945 – which might lay the groundwork for a particular professional

career, say in law, or a role in the application of science, or again be more of a general cultural nature. It would not in itself be a specific preparation for a job; and it would not be in wholly applied subjects. Despite the input to new universities from industry and business, there persisted strongly the feeling that somehow or other specific preparation for those walks of life was incompatible with the higher forms of education (an article in *The Times*, 26 July 1996, questions whether business is 'a respectable subject for universities'). Student intake should be small and highly selective, suitable both intellectually and personally to join university society. Teaching should be personal, with considerable emphasis on the pastoral as well as the didactic. University staff were in practice predominantly middle class, with a strong Oxbridge representation, and enjoyed an assured income of roughly twice the national average. Of course there were many exceptions to all this. Oxbridge itself invented such combination courses as Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) and had Dons of working-class origin. Birkbeck College, an integral part of the University of London, took only part-time students. After the Second World War, Keele (1949) adopted a first year of general studies followed by two majors; the Open University (1969) was even more innovative, with a completely modular system and non-residential students. There was even one new private university at Buckingham (founded in 1973, chartered in 1983). Each university was autonomous in academic matters, but it was assumed that educationally all were equal. This came to be ensured largely by the device of the external examiner, another application of the principle of peer review. It was derived partly from the Oxbridge model, specifically the 'Cambridge principle', in which the university, as examining body, is formally distinct from the tutors in their colleges; and partly from the growth of such independent examining bodies as the Royal Society of Arts, as well as the University of London and specifically the new Victoria University (see Part 2).

The whole system was relatively late in coming to be financed largely by the state. This began towards the end of the nineteenth century, but grew rapidly under the spiralling demands of science in particular, taking in Oxford as late as 1923. At that point the University's income still exceeded its expenditure, and

there was much anguish over the possible loss of independence. Many of the newer institutions benefited greatly from private donors, just as Oxbridge always had, and indeed this continues, although more rarely; it is far more common in the USA, with a more favourable taxation system and a wealthier economy. A method was developed by the University Grants Committee (UGC), which originated in 1889 with a budget of £15,000, under which funds were allocated for periods of five years at a time (the quinquennial system, 1908), which allowed for some stability and planning; and included money for both teaching and research (the dual support system). Once allocated, however, funds were spent as the individual institution thought fit. It was perhaps a typically British approach, a sort of 'hands-off' state control. It was also a rather gentlemanly system (anecdote claims that the Grants Committee never had anything so vulgar as an actual vote and concluded business in good time for lunch), and it worked rather well as long as there was enough money for the whole relatively small enterprise. By some it is still looked back on as a golden age. Nevertheless, only the ancient universities, with their accumulated endowments, retained any significant financial independence. Students were in most cases financed either by their families or by an increasingly complex system of grants from various sources.

So matters stood after the Second World War. The social and political climate in Britain, marked by a landslide victory for the Labour Party in 1945, favoured state planning and expenditure and the expansion of education. All these featured in the 1944 Education Act. The historian Corelli Barnett has argued that the policies adopted then (not just in education), by a nation which, although technically the victor in the struggle with Germany from 1914 to 1945, was financially virtually bankrupt, with industry outdated and inefficient and with only a disastrous illusion of world power, did much to create later problems. He puts the blame largely on, 'the nature of the British governing elite (including the opinion-forming intelligentsia). Overwhelmingly, this key piece of national equipment was the product of an academic humanist education at public school and Oxbridge... This small liberal elite was tender-hearted and high-minded, in that order' (Barnett 1995). The mature members of this elite had been educated, of course, before 1914, and it is easy

to see how their attitudes derive from the prevailing ethos we have noted. The Barlow Committee (1946) did call for the output of scientists and engineers to be doubled in ten years. The Department of Education, on the other hand, was concerned lest there be too few Arts graduates for high positions in management and government – scientists, of course, would not be suitable. It became accepted that new universities would be needed, and seven were announced between 1958 and 1961, financed partly by local authorities and voluntary support, but mainly by the UGC, that is the Treasury. The next significant step was the report of the Robbins Committee in 1963. This continued an expansionist policy. On extremely debatable evidence it concluded that the UK was falling behind other countries in the provision of higher education – especially the USA. It failed to note the importance of the thriving American private sector, and of the British non-university routes through technical colleges. Robbins established, among other things, the principle that university education should be available for all those 'qualified by ability and attainment' for it, which in practice meant gaining two passes at A-Level in the General Certificate of Education. Another 20 or so universities would be needed, all to be financed from the public purse. The Robbins Committee did not concern itself with how all this might be paid for; it set a pattern of thinking in numbers, rather than finance which is crucial to planning. In particular there was the matter of student support; but as it happened another enquiry, by the Anderson Committee, had just resulted in the principle that all students would be state-supported. This was simply an attempt to rationalise the existing complexity of support, on the assumption of relatively small numbers, but the cost fairly soon became unsupportable. Nor did Robbins ask where all the new academics were to come from, and there is little doubt that here too quantity took priority over quality, at least in some cases. Neither were conditions of service questioned, in particular the peculiar institution of 'tenure' under which an academic, once appointed, was virtually irremovable (it has now been abandoned). For academics themselves, this became an article of faith as the guarantor of the 'academic freedom' specified by von Humboldt. The typical model for the new universities was a purpose-built, residential

campus near, but not in, a provincial town, unlike the older civic universities.

No sooner was all this underway than a further initiative appeared in the proposal to create institutions of a new type altogether, the polytechnics, by upgrading existing colleges of technology. Eventually some 30 came into existence from 1970 onwards. This was the 'binary experiment' which, relatively recent though it was, may be unfamiliar to some. The original idea, enunciated by Education Secretary Anthony Crosland in 1965, was for a dual system stemming from the 'twin traditions' of academic and technical education. He gave four reasons: the greater range of type, mode and level of courses in the 'public', i.e. non-university sector; the low status of its senior institutions; the need for greater public control over higher education; and the need to promote technological education at a high level. While there was something in these points, they were based on four assumptions, none of which was really valid: that the universities were irretrievably academic and committed to full-time study; that they taught only at degree level and not below; that they were necessarily autonomous and thus less subject to public control; and that they were unable or unwilling to develop high level education in technology. The staff, students and courses of these new institutions, which were welcomed by those of a left-wing persuasion as 'the people's universities', were naturally, to begin with, those of the existing colleges. Much of the work was in science and technology or professional qualifications, and much was linked to local demands. Part-time study was common. Many staff had industrial or commercial experience. Their contracts did not specify research, although quite a lot of research was carried out, sometimes in conjunction with local industry. Conditions of pay were those of teachers; there was no such thing as tenure. Pay was significantly lower than in universities, though an effort was made to equalise it following the Houghton Report in 1974 (to the unconcealed disgust of many university staff). There was a general tradition of more formal, sometimes paternalistic teaching, often aimed mainly at getting students through examinations which were often set outside the institution. Principals and heads of departments (no professors) were usually very much administrators rather than academics. Finance was controlled, down to detailed

estimates, by the Local Education Authority, and the curriculum usually either by professional bodies or the University of London in the form of external degrees.

This last was to change most significantly. There was available an independent body, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), with the power to grant degrees, conferred by Royal Charter. The Charter stated that the awards were to be 'comparable in status to awards granted and conferred by Universities'. The CNAA had grown out of an earlier National Committee for Technological Awards dating back to 1955; the first CNAA-approved courses started in 1965. The CNAA not only rapidly extended its operations to cover all areas of study, in some hundreds of institutions not just the new polytechnics, it developed a whole elaborate system of vetting not merely of the awards, but of the courses leading to them; and this involved a close examination of the qualities of the teaching and support staff, the detailed syllabuses of the courses, and every aspect of the institutions themselves – their finances, governance (which had to be more democratic), physical resources, social amenities and everything else that could affect the education offered. In principle, the CNAA did not prescribe: it assessed the quality of what was done, and stood as guarantor of the worth of the resulting qualifications. Nothing like this had been seen before in higher education, at least in Britain, and it had a most profound impact. The most significant aspect, perhaps, was that it forced all those involved to question and rethink what they were doing, and then to justify it. Of course this gave rise to a great deal of paper and a great deal of talk, some of it vague or perfunctory, or ill-informed or dogmatic. But overall, the result, as far as teaching was concerned, was courses that were well planned, adequately resourced and enthusiastically taught, and students who felt they were involved and were getting a fair deal. Personal experience attests to numerous polytechnic students who compared their education favourably with what their contemporaries were getting at universities.

The basis of the system was the well-tried method of peer review; the CNAA made its judgements through a structure of (unpaid and hence more independent) committees, in particular Subject Boards, composed of those experienced in higher education or other relevant professional work. At first the academics

were largely from the universities, but increasingly they were drawn from the public sector itself. An important procedural point was that normally committees had the power to approve on the spot, face to face with the institution; they didn't report back to an anonymous superordinate. A great deal of thought went into satisfying the 'comparability' criterion, and in many respects this was broadly achieved: CNAA graduates were accepted in every formal way, for example for postgraduate training courses in universities. Where there was competition for jobs, they could be at a disadvantage, unless the particular polytechnic, or department within it, had established its own reputation. It might be guessed, rather than asserted, that the two systems formed two overlapping distributions of quality, and that the universities, due to their greater autonomy, had a wider spread. The highest standards reached by universities possibly excelled any in polytechnics; but standards could drop in some areas with little external check – the external examiner system was far from foolproof – whereas in the public sector a level of adequacy was maintained. 'Comparable' with universities meant more than a minimum. In many respects, of course, universities retained a massive superiority, for example in academic qualifications of staff, physical resources and research activity. Polytechnics did not share in the dual funding system and research money had to be found by, so to say, saving out of the housekeeping. The prestige, greater resources and often more attractive locations of universities undoubtedly meant that they attracted more able students.

It was not a perfect system. All committees can at times be petty or biased, and may have a conservative effect, even unintentionally: I myself overheard remarks of the form 'the CNAA would never allow it', which, as Chairman of the relevant Subject Board, I knew not to be the case. But generally it led, it can be argued, to a form of higher education that was in many ways better thought out and more efficient than had traditionally been the case in universities, while at the same time avoiding the dangers of central control, and preserving, indeed enhancing, the values of institutional autonomy. This was a quite deliberate policy: the aim of the CNAA was to assist developing institutions to become progressively more responsible for their own decisions. In terms of quality, the binary experiment can be

counted a success. Quantity worked out rather differently to what had been envisaged. Polytechnics, like their predecessor colleges, were demand-led. They were flexible enough to provide whatever the student market wanted, within limits. To quite a large extent, this was what was left over from the universities. In particular, the Robbins Committee had greatly overestimated the demand for science and technology, and universities accordingly increased their provision, with the *result* that many excellent polytechnic departments which had been doing the job for years found themselves short of numbers and were eventually, and wastefully, run down and closed. The more able staff retrained, the weaker ones lingered on more or less as supernumeraries (although they did not have tenure, management fear of trade unions made most staff almost as secure). The actual demand from students increased markedly, for reasons not fully understood, in the social sciences, humanities and business studies. Demand also contributed to a drift to full-time study and away from part-time, exacerbated by Department of Education funding rules which ludicrously undercosted the latter in relation to the former, doubtless reflecting the assumption that only full-time education really counts. Similarly lower level work was phased out, for reasons of prestige and finance and the demands of the remainder of the local authority sector. Conversely research and graduate work, not originally part of the polytechnic brief, were reintroduced both because of the existing tradition and because of the overriding prestige of research in the academic world. And academic staff, similarly, shifted markedly in the direction of higher academic qualifications and less experience in commerce and industry (from 50% in 1965 to 25% by the mid 1970s).

There was always an element of artificiality about the binary system, with its implication that there were two quite distinct types of higher education, whereas in fact the institutions all had much in common. Planning had its absurd aspects: committees charged with assessing the need for new public sector courses in a region would solemnly assert that there was no provision when in fact identical courses were being offered by local universities. There was pressure from the polytechnics to have their status raised formally to university level. Among the reasons for which they had originally been created were lower costs and

greater central control. For some time government had used the existence of the two systems to play one off against the other when it came to increasing numbers or decreasing expenditure. Britain's continuing economic decline and the ever-rising demands of the welfare state at last made the latter an overriding factor. The university quinquennial system collapsed in 1974 under the impact of inflation; attempts at economy made by the Thatcher administration in 1981 ('the cuts') destabilised the system and made it amenable to change. That change, it gradually became clear, was towards a view of higher education as an economic resource, training the upper levels of the workforce, a shift symbolised in the absorption by the Department for Education of most of the functions of that of Employment, in July 1995. It has been argued rather convincingly (by Salter and Tapper 1994) that the former Department of Education and Science embarked in the early 1970s on a deliberate policy to unify the whole higher education system so as to facilitate the central management of educational change – and, of course, economy. Formally this was done in 1992 when the polytechnics were created universities by statute. At the same time the CNAA was disbanded, some of its functions passing to the Open University, but most of its former clients either becoming independent or coming under the wing of a university. New central funding arrangements and mechanisms for quality control were set up, applying to the whole of higher education. So far as the latter have been seen in action, they appear to have abandoned all the valuable lessons learned over the previous 20 years, and simply to ignore all that has been established by experience and research in the last 150 as to what works well and less well in education.

Some other recent developments

Since 1945 higher education has changed around the world in far too much detail to explore here, though many of the main trends are common to many countries, in particular rising demand, rising costs with the need for economy or different modes of funding, and increased central control, often with a political or religious slant. Even in some economically advanced countries, Western-style universities are only a century or so old, for

example Japan (1885); in developing areas, 50 years or less. Various features of other national systems have been compared, usually favourably, with those of Britain. The Prince of Wales is reported as saying in Paris:

> The sheer brilliance, independence of mind, and intellectual rigour of the annual student harvest of the *grandes écoles* are, I am sure, a great strength for France...I have respect for a system which is able to combine the pursuit of excellence with equality of opportunity: I think your system has lessons for us in Britain (*The Times*, 17 March 1994).

Roxanne Powell, a researcher at the London School of Economics, contrasted the successful French development of a high speed train with the failure of the British counterpart, tracing it partly to the differential status of engineers in the two countries, in turn partly due to the education systems (reported in *The Times Higher*, 21 April 1995) – a familiar story. In Germany, a new sort of institution, the *Fachhochschulen*, are in some ways what the polytechnics were intended to be: they produce 70% of graduate engineers, but also 90% of social workers and 40% of economists (von Hoyningen-Huene 1992). There is an emphasis on teaching, especially of practical skills, using small groups with frequent individual contact between students and teachers, well-structured curricula with clear study plans and closely monitored student progress, and practical experience in industry. The aim is to produce competent practitioners rather than future researchers. But as here, it seems there is pressure from staff to give more time and resources to research.

However, while the examples of other countries are often quoted in contrast to the alleged failings of the British system, the major direct influence has been that of the USA, although only some features have so far been emulated. It is there that there have been by far the greatest efforts to balance the demands of quantity and quality. American higher education is delivered by a variety of institutions. Kerr (1990, 1991), distinguishes four main dimensions along which these institutions of higher education may vary: public or private ownership; internal or external control; public or private funding; and external or internal mechanisms for the distribution of funding. Of the various possible combinations, Kerr describes six major types, of which most countries tend to adopt one or two, but all of

which are represented in the USA. The British polytechnic model is quite close to the State College pattern, whereas Harvard is more akin to Oxbridge as it was before the advent of state funding. Currently, it appears that the British system is moving rapidly towards uniformity, with public ownership and funding and external control, but still some elements of internal distribution. Clark Kerr was himself one of the prime movers in what has been called the 'Great Transformation' in American higher education between 1960 and 1980. As President of the University of California (a post which has no exact equivalent here – it is perhaps most like that of director in the former polytechnics), he devised a plan which involved a differentiation of function between institutions, combined with advisory co-ordination above them. There was to be universal access to higher education (at last), via the system of community colleges, which should offer a general initial programme; occupational skills would be the task of the state colleges; and the University of California itself would provide research, and training for research and for the high level professions. This resulted, according to Kerr, in a stable, workable system meeting educational needs, but still with some drawbacks, such as a diminished private sector influence, a decimated programme of liberal education, and campuses fractured along lines of race, sex and ethnicity, as well as still remaining inequalities of opportunity. Still, Morgan and Mitchell (1985) reported that in 1979, 34% of colleges nation-wide admitted virtually all applicants without regard to academic qualifications. Fifty-six per cent required some minimal qualification such as one subject completed in high school (perhaps equivalent to half an A-level in the UK), while only 8% were 'competitive' in the sense that applicants who met the specified requirements did not necessarily gain admittance.

The basic academic unit is the department headed by a non-permanent 'chair'; the teaching unit is the module. This has the advantage of flexibility, for student, teacher and institution, but it also gives rise to costly administration, difficulty in maintaining common standards, tensions resulting from 'instructors' being also responsible for assessment of the students they have taught, and lack of coherence in an individual student's programme. This last is perhaps of particular concern given the long

history of debate over a 'core curriculum'. The inevitable consequence of universal access is, of course, that students vary greatly in level of attainment. Several major reports on undergraduate education have emphasised four linked desiderata: a need for better language teaching, because students cannot read, write or speak effectively, to which some add basic mathematics; the inculcation of a sense of 'values', however defined; related to this, that college graduates should become good citizens; and that the syllabus should have a coherent and unifying purpose and structure, and thus life-long value. The method generally adopted to achieve these aims is that of the 'major/minor'; in addition to specialist subjects students spend between 25 per cent and 50 per cent of their time on other material. Some argue that this often adds little to a student's education, indeed it is reminiscent of the unlamented 'liberal studies' that in the 1960s were so often plastered over British courses at various levels in science and technology – by definition illiberal. A different plan is to seek to build in the goals of liberal education to all programmes, and require that their achievement be demonstrated. At Virginia Commonwealth University, it is reported (by Hall with Kevles 1982), the following general educational outcomes are assessed: ability to read knowledgeably and write effectively; a basic understanding of mathematics, statistics and computing; literacy in science and understanding the role of science; understanding the social environment; appreciation of the human condition and its historical dimensions; understanding of the diversity of value systems of aesthetics and ethics; understanding of cultural diversity; and habits of self-exploration and life-long learning. To those of us who have spent most of a lifetime gaining some small insight into a fraction of this lot, the programme seems an ambitious one. A relatively recent development under the name of 'service learning' attempts to combine foundational, professional and socially responsive knowledge. The first includes discipline mastery and liberal education; the second is vocationally oriented; while the third draws on both but with the aim of solving social problems or promoting social values, reviving the old ideal of citizenship which has never been absent from American education (Altman 1996). Another approach is to try to specify some kind of essential component of liberal education, and two traditions have

been pre-eminent, at least in the USA (Kimball 1988), namely reason and rhetoric – reminiscent, at least, of the platonic and sophistic traditions in the ancient world. In the 19th century the former came to dominate (currently it takes the form of 'critical thinking'), but there is a case for the latter. Taylor *et al.* (1988) argue that, 'there is a close connection between the nature and quality of our students' language and the nature and quality of their learning' and that accordingly, 'language ought to be placed much closer to the centre of learning than most universities ever dream of contemplating'.

An important influence in the USA has been the 'Chicago model' of university education, with a strong liberal arts strain that emphasised familiarity with not only the humanities but the sciences and social sciences, and aimed to produce independent, critical thinkers. It can be contrasted with the French *grandes écoles*, the German Humboldtian research university, the British residential/Oxbridge ideal, and various others. Holmes and McLean (1989) show that, correspondingly, there have developed national ideals as to what should be taught, or rather how a curriculum is to be conceived, at any level of education. Thus in France two underlying notions, which came to the fore at the Revolution, are that all men are capable of reason and the acquisition of moral ideas, and that the content of education should embrace all human knowledge – the 'encyclopaedist' view. In the USA, on the other hand, partly as a result of pioneering, 'frontier' values, and partly through the specific influence of John Dewey (1859–1952), education came to be seen as involving, or indeed being founded upon, problem-solving, resulting in a 'pragmatic' view of the curriculum which fits very well with the modular structure; students take what they need. In England and Wales (Scotland is different once more), an 'essentialist' view has been dominant in which certain specified specialist subjects, at first the classical languages and later the modern grammar school subjects and established university disciplines, offered an education of (relatively) high culture and entry to upper levels of society. The 'essentialism' is seen in arguments over what is 'really' a university, and what it should or should not teach, and similarly over what is 'really' the study of this or that subject. Such national differences are not absolute: the Virginia system is encyclopaedist, and 'critical thinking'

essentialist. British modular degrees are in principle pragmatic; in practice less so.

Williams (1992) suggests there are three main views as to the relationship between higher education and society. One is of the self-governing, autonomous university as a community or college of scholars, in which students are learners of a discipline, in effect apprentice scholars. Another view sees the university as a public service corporation provided by government, with students as trainees for a range of more or less useful occupations. In the third, universities are enterprises in the knowledge industry, of which students are customers, as indeed are, in a different way, employers both public and private. There is a strong tradition of the first type in the UK, stemming largely from Oxbridge, and of course harking back to the mediaeval origins of universities as far as structure is concerned, although the major function was professional training. France has largely favoured the second model, as have some other continental countries. In the USA, there are elements of all three, sometimes combined in one institution. For example it is the relatively independent private universities that dominate research, but in this they are largely supplying the needs of government and industry, rather like 'major sport franchises... It is more accurate and fairer to say that research and development have become big business and universities...have become part of that business' (Rosenzweig 1992). In the UK many are clinging to some conception of the first type, while various pressures are driving mainly towards the second, which is much more like that of the polytechnics. In many ways, the decision to 'call the polytechnics universities' was in fact a decision, deliberate or not, to turn the latter into the former.

Looked at historically, the range of possible models for higher education is even wider, as we have noted. It has always been necessary to strike some kind of balance between quality and quantity. What the balance is depends on values, whether explicit or implicit, as well as on demand and resources. It is possible for all or nearly all of a population to acquire moral, religious or political dogma. Most could no doubt acquire principles of citizenship, or some cultural awareness. Far fewer can enter recognised professions, each of which will always be a relatively small body catering for large numbers of others. Even

fewer can attain excellence in any field. This is not due to any 'elitism', but simply because achievement is a relative matter: the concept of excellence implies being better than nearly all others; 'the best' can only mean 'better than the rest'. At the same time we should not be obsessed with what has counted as excellent in the recent past, but rather ask the more practical question as to whether an education that has any claim to be good and useful can be made available to a wider range of students than hitherto.

PART II

Standards and Assessment in Higher Education

Chapter 2

Academic Standards and the Quality Management Debate in British Higher Education

Peter de Vries

Introduction

Higher education in Britain is currently engaged in an intense debate on the comparability of academic standards. The debate surfaced in 1994 when the then Secretary of State for Education, Mr John Patten, invited the higher education sector to give greater attention to 'broad comparability' of academic standards across institutions. This is taking place while attempts are being made to embed quality management principles in institutions. The response from the academic community has been to deny the possibility of comparability (Becher 1996), but also to use the academic standards platform to neuter quality management efforts. The reason is that the academic community has viewed this ideology as the means by which university administrators have sought to gain control of the quality of its work. Academics are claiming that the essential form of quality (besides research) with which higher education is concerned is the quality of its graduates, and that quality management is an inappropriate means for ensuring 'graduateness' (a term coined by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). Their argument is that they have sole jurisdiction over judgements of academic standards, and that the reciprocal collegial arrangements within subject disciplines provide the appropriate mechanisms for ensuring worth. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between the two competing concepts. To do this, the ideological

aspects of quality management will be discussed, mainly in relation to the notion of technology transfer, followed by a discussion of academic standards which is tied to a collegial management structure. Both quality management and academic standards will be viewed in relation to Lukes' (1974) three-dimensional model of power to highlight how they are being used in a contestation for control within institutions.

Quality management ideology

I shall adopt Larrain's (1994) definition of ideology to explain the contestation for power:

> In general there exist two traditions in the conceptualisation of ideology. One understands ideology as an epistemological neutral concept which refers to a conjunction of ideas and propositions which are articulated with the interests of a class, party or social group. The other understands ideology as a critical concept which refers to a certain type of distorted thought which remains trapped in the appearances of reality and which, therefore, masks and conceals the real relations and social contradictions of society. (p.292)

Using Larrain's second conceptualisation of ideology as a form of power, I am postulating that quality management as it is applied in universities is a misrepresentation of the way in which quality education is achieved. To substantiate this thesis, I will explain how the ideology of quality management in higher education originated and operates in terms of the regeneration of business, management rationality, technical rationality, emotive language, covert conflicts and ambiguities, and power.

The underpinning argument for the regeneration of business

To understand the imperative for using quality management ideology for the administration of higher education institutions, one should first examine the underpinning rhetoric. There has been intense debate on Britain's declining competitiveness in world markets (Newby 1994) and the need to address the imbalance (although Newby has also pointed out that this had been a continuing debate for the past 150 years to which The Great Exhibition in 1851 sought to alert the British business

world). An integral aspect of this belief is that the administration of higher education institutions needs to be reformed using quality management principles to make it more efficient and to improve the quality (Trow 1994a), to ensure that it provides a skilled, knowledgeable workforce.

The rational management model

Its advocates claim that this model is predicated on a logical analysis of the higher education context and the rationalisation and technologisation of the process. According to the quality management rationale:

- the managers define the aims and objectives to be attained
- the managers establish criteria and systems for the monitoring and evaluation of educational outcomes
- the managers do not trust the academics in their institutions to deliver quality products
- they require written documentation: transparent procedures, written reports, criteria for performance and regulations for accountability.

In adopting these formulae, most university administrators have now established a post of pro-vice-chancellor (quality) and/or an administrative department concerned with quality issues, and have built up mechanisms for ascertaining that the quality formulae are embedded in the structures and processes of the institution. In the quality management model, managers use needs analysis, departmental reviews, student opinion surveys, peer observation, analysis of examination results and the like to determine the deficiencies of the academic component; they then devise training programmes to remedy the deficiencies and to restore this academic component into the system to make it function optimally. In the ensuing sections, this representation of how quality management achieves quality higher education will be discussed.

The technical rationality model

An important aspect of the quality management model is its adoption of the ideology of instrumentalism, technical rational-

ity or scientism. This way of reasoning is concerned with finding the best means to predetermined ends. It emphasises logical reality, based on the assumption that when higher quality processes are used, we will attain high quality products. This determinist cause-and-effect precept in scientific enquiry leads to the myth that nothing can be established except by the scientific method – linear thinking (Newby 1994). Three factors in the field of human endeavour, with particular emphasis on education, and in our case, higher education, create problems with the application of the linear models. First, as Schön (1983) asserts, the development of a scientific knowledge base depends on fixed, unambiguous ends, where professional practice is an instrumental activity and properties of specialism, boundedness, scientific application, standardisation of problems, and the uniform application of scientific principles are appropriate. However, as Glazer (quoted by Schön 1983) points out, professions such as education suffer from shifting ambiguous ends, based on different value systems, and from unstable institutional contexts in practice, and are therefore unable to develop a systematic, scientific knowledge base. Ends (missions, objectives, aims, intents, goals) are a particular problem in higher education as in practice different contexts, different cultures and different values (HEQC 1994c) mediate the uniform application of standardised applied knowledge. For example, the plurality of institutional types encountered in higher education – distance education, monotechnics, dual economy, single discipline, large diversified, vocational – presented major problems in the assessment of the subject disciplines carried out by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 1994–95 (deVries 1995, 1996).

Second, linearity is based on the assumption that the characteristics of human activities can be identified and, once known, transmitted by means of training. The assumption that a complex social activity such as education is amenable to dissection in this manner needs to be explored. Teachers have different teaching styles and learners different learning styles, and these are complicated by the nature of the curriculum content being delivered, the aims and objectives of the course of study, and the particular topic being addressed, as well as the context, culture, values and understandings of the situation. It is not simply a

case of applying standard formulae, as assessors' published reports on subject assessments conducted by the HEFCE testify to; the characteristics appeared to defy categorisation; instead the assessors tended to capture, and report on, many surface realities of education which did not necessarily have a bearing on the quality of teaching, such as whether:

- the teacher used the overhead projector
- the overhead transparencies were well constructed
- the teacher gave out notes to students
- the teacher used different modes of presentation (HEFCE Quality Assessment Reports, 1993–94,[1] *passim*).

However, the presence of all these peripheral concerns is not the *sine qua non* of good classroom presentation. They may in some circumstances be good aids to teaching for some academics, but are not necessarily so for all in all circumstances as the assessors' statements imply.

Third, an assumption of the technical rationality model is that the observer can, and does, take a disinterested view of the proceedings to define characteristics divorced from the value systems they hold. Two recent reports invalidate this assumption. Becher (1996) showed that excellent grades awarded by HEFCE assessors differed by as much as 67 per cent between subjects such as anthropology and engineering; and deVries (1995) found that assessors' mindset played a significant role in their judgements of academic departments: they tended to favour departments that 'resembled their own'. It would appear, then, that technical rationality, which is an integral aspect of quality management, is a way of thinking which tends to ignore aspects of human nature which do not conform to universal precepts. It is a form of reductionism which denigrates human studies to a problem of determinism and ignores the human person in all his/her variety. Its effect is to reduce individuality to conformity, and judgements become sets of rules and processes which provide little scope for the development of alternative forms.

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1 During the period 1993–94 the HEFCE published 134 subject assessment reports and these have been extracted from that series.

Emotive language of the quality management ethos

Quality management systems and processes are ideological as they are sets of assumptions and values which are independent of the context in which they are applied (Larrain 1979). In fact they could be encountered in most business organisations to 'ensure' that its processes perform efficiently and effectively. One of the ways in which legitimacy is attained is through the language used in the ideology. The language is that of output systems, in which people are treated as ciphers as though they are so many objects being processed on an assembly line; whether one is processing 'widgets' or students is immaterial to the model as the same processes apply. It beguiles us at the meta-level through the chains of association of emotive words used such as 'quality'; the message the word transmits is that this is a state to which everyone in every institution should strive and, above all, if we use the systems of business, quality will be 'assured'; moreover, the systems can be 'managed' so that quality actually ensues. The interpellative connotations are that we are part of this new movement – the language creates in us a feeling of excitement to think that we, the actors, are harbingers of quality (that we own the system). We gain a sense of security from having a place within this order. No alternatives to achieving the end product are provided; consequently, we are led to believe that it is only by following these precepts that we will be able to create a quality institution.

Covert conflicts and ambiguities

In adopting this conceptualisation of ideology, I also accept Foucault's notion of, 'power being tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms' (Foucault 1984, quoted in Larrain 1994). The conflicts it conceals are inherent in its processes. Lukes (1974) has pointed out that an essential aspect of the quality system, audit (or its cousins assessment, review, validation and accreditation), is in fact a 'bankrupt' notion, as the recent financial scandals of BCCI, Maxwell, Clowes and Barings will testify to.

Moreover, the notion of 'assurance' is a fundamental contradiction, equally bankrupt, when one realises that the managers have very limited control over what actually happens at the

coal-face of the classroom. Finch (1996) emphasises the need for judgement in the sphere of academia. She has pointed out that, 'the administration has no capacity to define and enforce academic standards in isolation from the academic community itself'. She goes on to explain that the whole of the academic enterprise depends on there being a reasonably clear collective understanding between academics in a given discipline that a particular piece of work counts as good and something else as less good. It will be noted that the quality management system is excluded from these judgements which can, and do, occur outside that structure. Quality management processes cannot 'ensure' that academic staff will carry out quality research, teach to a 'standard' or that they 'produce' quality students. They can only provide the systems and processes that operate at the superordinate level – and not always that well if one is to believe quality assessment, quality audit and the OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) assessment reports – that do not impinge on the crucial academic judgements of quality. In 1996 COSHEP (Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals) recognised that academic standards were related to, but distinct from, the 'quality debate'. They suggested that, 'as the UK system was diverse in terms of mission, student intake and graduate output, it would be difficult to define these standards in any uniform way. Rather, institutions might themselves be better placed to define standards'.

The concept of power

The key to the ideological issue being presented is the concept of power: that the university administrators try to assume the power to control the academic process: the administrative hierarchy in the managerial model becomes managers. They arrogate to themselves the power to require compliance with the systems of monitoring, review and accountability to make the model operate optimally.

Steven Lukes' three dimensions of power will be used to structure our thinking on quality management in higher education: power as force; power as access; power as control. The first and third dimensions will be used immediately, and the second in the section on collegial relations. First, the university administrator does have the power to terminate the contract of any

academic for dereliction of duty. This first dimension of power postulated by Weber and later Dahl (Lukes 1974) entails the naked exercise of force to make the academic conform to certain dictates. The university administrator also has access to the third dimension of power: the ability to make people see only one view of reality, in our case the quality management ideology. But to gain control – to ensure accountability and quality – politicians and university administrators have had to:

- rework the vocabulary through which universities are perceived by electorates
- replace the traditional vocabulary of defence used by academics (academic freedom, autonomy, knowledge creation)
- try to channel, manage and measure creativity (Cowen 1996, p.3).

Previously degree standards, the levels of attainment needed to gain particular 'classes' of degree, were defined largely in a totally informal and unwritten way (Alderman 1996). The relationship between teacher and student was sacrosanct, beyond any external scrutiny. According to the rhetoric, the only way to achieve quality is to use the quality management model. However, as Lukes points out, the controlled are not necessarily passive in their compliance with the power of management and do have space within the system to contest the unilateral prescription.

Academic standards and the collegial ideology

Currently, in the UK, the managerial ethos could be viewed as the dominant ideology in higher education, as the HEQC's audit of processes and procedures and the HEFCE's requirements for self-assessments, reviews, staff development programmes, objectives, transparency, reporting and the other trappings of quality management have structured the way in which institutions operate to attain quality. However, it would have been more appropriate to have stated 'seem to operate', for these processes are the outward manifestations of a system of quality administration with which most institutions are obliged to comply.

Although ideologies promote a culture of compliance, they also lead to contestation. The contestation in this case comes from those who have a direct vested interest in quality issues and in how they are played out in the teaching and learning situation, the academic community. One needs to look at the academics' power to promote the counter-ideology; their ability to contest and promote alternative scenarios, and their ability to label the dominant ideology as a misrepresentation of reality. To explain the collegial scenario, I shall discuss power, control at the academic coal-face, academic judgements of quality, rhetoric of collegiality, and covert conflicts and ambiguities in collegial relationships.

Power in collegial relationships

We shall now examine how the power of academics is constituted and realised through collegiality. Academics have power in two senses: on Lukes' (1974) second dimension, which he attributes to Bacrach and Baratz, they have the power to place the issue of academic standards on the national agenda: conferences have been organised to discuss this issue, articles have been written about it, and the HEQC has a major research programme dedicated to it. Academics are claiming that they are the final arbiters of what passes for academic standards, defined by the HEQC (1994a) as, 'explicit levels of academic attainment which are used to describe and measure academic requirements and achievements of individual students and groups of students'. As they have this power, their technical expertise weakens hierarchical authority, as it defies routinatisation and has allegiance to a professional rather than an institutional code.

Control at the academic coal-face

The counter-ideology that academics use for promoting themselves is that of collegiality, to which the whole issue of academic standards is inextricably tied. The academic postulates not an academic market-place but a collegium of scholars – an invisible bond that links one scholar with another – a web of intangible relationships based on Gouldner's notion of reciprocity (1960). Finch (1996) mentions this academic interchange and how,

through collegial relationships, academics ensure high standards of achievement for their students. They control (or control through the administrative arm of the institution) how they shall teach, whom they shall select as colleagues to teach within institutions, and what they shall teach. This autonomy, which is usually ascribed to the institution, is a task of the academics, who, because of their knowledge skills and expertise in a particular area, are in reality the only ones who can make the appropriate decisions about these issues.

Judgements

Academics set the assessment regimes and judge whether, and at what level, the students accord with their concepts of a graduate: 'academic standards must in their very nature depend on a complex process of judgement which is sensitive to contextual as well as intrinsic considerations' (Becher 1996). The process is placed further beyond the reach of the quality management regime by placing the final arbitration of what counts as quality outside the institution in the hands of the external examiner from another institution. Three studies will be used to reinforce the notion of the paramountcy of the academic process in establishing worth through the judgements that they make. First, Silver, Stennett, and Williams (1995) in their study found that the external examiner was the upholder of the relevant academic culture. Second, Brennan, El-Khawas and Shah (1994) found that it is the peer group relations that sustain quality. Third, Finch (1996), in Table 2.1, lists 13 issues on which academics collaborate with one another within collegial relationships to ensure the excellence of their education and research provision. They bond together according to this model in reciprocal relationships to ensure high academic standards.

The rhetoric of collegiality

The concept of a collegium of scholars could be regarded as yet another ideology, but in this case complying with Larrain's first conceptualisation of an ideology, as 'an epistemologically neutral concept'. It is predicated on sets of assumptions and values about society which are presented in such an appealing way as

Table 2.1: The nature of collegial roles[1]

Role	*On whose behalf*
Referee (articles)	Academic journal
Book reviewer	Academic journal and commercial publisher
Editor	Academic journal
Referee (book proposals)	Commercial publisher
Referee (grant proposals)	Various grant-awarding bodies
Board member/Chair	Grant-awarding body
External examiner (students' work)	Various Universities
Referee (staff appointments and promotions)	Various Universities
External reviewer (Departmental reviews)	Various Universities
Panel member (course validation)	CNAA[2] and various Universities
Academic auditor	AAU[3], HEQC
Assessor (teaching quality)	Funding Council
Panel member (research assessment)	Funding Council

1 J. Finch (1996) 'Power, legitimacy and standards', paper delivered at the QSC Conference on Changing Conceptions of Academic Standards, London, 12 March.
2 Council for National Academic Awards.
3 Academic Audit Unit of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals.

to make them seem natural. They use a chain of associated concepts to make the ideology seem vivid and real: reciprocity, college of scholars, experience, knowledge, autonomy. The rhetoric is the social cement that beguiles us into believing that the academic community work together to achieve the same goals.

Covert conflicts and ambiguities in collegial relationships

However, one needs to consider how fast the cement really is. In postulating the elegance of the collegium as an assurance system to maintain quality, academics misrepresent the reciprocal relations therein. First, Gouldner (1960) reminds us that the

concept of 'reciprocity' is a representation of what actually happens in real life. We all want more from interactions than reciprocity can offer. In academia, we gain prestige and an extra line on our curriculum vitae for being part of the 13 collegial arrangements mentioned by Janet Finch (Table 2.1) and can easily allow the exercise of these collegial relationships to degenerate into a compliance exercise. Second, judgements are not always uncontested, as is shown from the following findings gleaned from Becher, the HEQC, Silver *et al.*, deVries and reports in the daily press. Becher (1996) showed that there were wide disparities in academics' judgements of first-class passes in student assessments, and vast differences in subject assessment gradings achieved through the collegial process. Research by the HEQC (1994c) has found that class percentages in honours degrees vary considerably between subjects and between institutions. The number of first-class passes has increased steadily nearly everywhere and consequently the upper second-class pass has now become the most common outcome in student assessments for the honours degree. Silver *et al.* (1995) have shown that there are buddy-buddy relationships between some external examiners which are inimical to the attainment of high academic standards, and deVries (1996) found that peers tended to be co-opted by the buffer organisation, the HEFCE, and adopted its norms and values: they did not act as 'peers' but as extensions of the HEFCE. In another study, deVries (1995), found that 'peers' who were on assessment teams for the assessment of education in subject departments were not always viewed as peers by the academics in those departments. The findings of this study were corroborated by the following reports in the press on the behaviour of peers on assessment visits which nullify the notion of peer group interaction:

> Music: 'the assessors were perceived to have an "unprofessional" and "confrontational" style' (*The Times Higher Education Supplement* 1995a).
>
> English: 'the assessors were criticised for being "boorish and crudely insensitive"' (*The Guardian* 1995).
>
> History: 'frequent lack of the appropriate subject expertise and therefore the absence in practice of genuine peer review' (*The Times Higher Education Supplement* 1995b).

Nevertheless, there is a set of coherent concepts that make up this counter-ideology which is currently being purveyed very strongly to contest the dominant ideology of quality management in the academic sphere.

Postscript

Many academics may believe that quality management in higher education is merely the current fad being pursued in a society which is in the grip of New Right politics, another ideology which is promoting managerial principles in all facets of UK society. They hope that when quality management fails to deliver what it purports to deliver – quality education and quality graduates who will lead the way to the new order – it will be abandoned in favour of the old, tried and tested collegial system for achieving quality provision. When this state is achieved, they believe that they will be able to return to the halcyon days of the past. But this scenario seems to be based on hope rather than a rational analysis of the nature of social institutions, for, as Burton Clark (1983, p. 260) reminds us: 'Based on the Weberian Legacy in classical sociology of thought: modern societies are replete with irreconcilable values; organised life is then a power struggle, since it is power that ultimately determines whose values gain priority and who pays the costs.'

What is more likely to happen is that a new ideology will replace quality management, as the contestation for the hearts and minds of all in academia continues unabated.

Chapter 3

Factors Impacting on Academic Standards

Ruth Williams

Introduction

The current interest in academic standards in the UK is a product of, and essentially a recognition of, the move from elite to mass higher education. This move has resulted in a more heterogeneous student body and greater student choice in terms of the types of programmes and awards that are available, and the types of institutions providing those programmes and awards. The interest in academic standards has been sharpened by the abolition of the binary line in 1992, which had divided the former polytechnics and colleges from the universities, and the creation of an expanded and more diverse university system. In addition to this development, new external quality assurance arrangements were set up in order to secure greater accountability from institutions for the central government funding they received. As a consequence of these developments and a decreasing unit of resource, concerns about academic standards, which were once a private matter within the academic community, have now become public.

It is argued here that academic standards vary between institutions and there is no universal academic standard or 'gold standard' that institutions can, or would wish to, aspire to in the 1990s. The chapter explores the relationships between expansion, diversity and quality management – three factors which have characterised the development of UK higher education over the last 30 years – and their impact on academic standards.

This relationship can be depicted in a simple diagram (Figure 3.1). A brief overview is given of issues relating to academic standards to set the context of the chapter. The development of expansion and diversity in UK higher education is described and, related to this, the rise of quality management, both internal and external to institutions of higher education. Finally the implications and effects of these developments on academic standards are discussed.

Figure 3.1. Impacts on academic standards

Academic standards

In the UK, academic standards have traditionally been set and maintained by the institutions themselves, but sometimes with external validation, as in the case of the former polytechnics and colleges, and where programmes of study require professional and statutory body accreditation. One way of representing academic standards in teaching and learning is demonstrated in Table 3.1, depicting them in relation to educational inputs, processes and outputs.

Table 3.1 Academic standards in teaching and learning

Type of academic standard:	*Which measure:*	*Using criteria defined by:*
Inputs	• Students' entry qualifications and previous experience	Admissions policies
	• Teaching staff	Selection procedures
	• Learning resources and support services	Adequate and available funding
Processes	• Students' learning experience and progress	Programme accreditation policies
	• Curriculum content and organisation	The quality of teaching staff; learning resources; support services
	• Teaching, learning and assessment strategies	
Outputs	• Students' achievements:	Learning objectives
	– knowledge	Assessment strategies
	– skills	
	– understanding	

Alternatively, Trow (1994a) provides a list of features which he claims establish and measure the academic standards to which a particular university will aspire. These features are the quality of the teachers, the quality of the students, the quality of research and scholarship, the quality of the curriculum, courses and instruction, and the co-ordination and monitoring of the mechanisms of quality control. Additions to this list might include academic networking (e.g. conferences) and peer review activities such as refereeing journal articles and research proposals. And unique to the UK is the external examiner system which has operated as a traditional and key mechanism for maintaining and comparing quality and academic standards across institutions and subjects.

UK institutions have traditionally asserted that their academic standards are maintained through the quality of their student intake, the quality of the staff and curriculum, staff research activity and the external examiner system. In the pre-1992 universities, formal institutional quality assurance proce-

dures for setting and maintaining standards were, in the main, based on individual departmental admissions policies and the external examiner system, supported by other implicit procedures – an approach based on, 'informality, professionalism and trust...the watchwords that reflected a smaller, less diverse, academic community' (Higher Education Quality Council; HEQC 1994a). Academic standards and quality in the former polytechnics and colleges, on the other hand, were regulated by the former Council for National Academic Awards, which was charged to ensure comparability with the university sector until its dissolution in 1992. The Council performed this task through the accreditation and review of both institutions and programmes of study (using peer review, which in the early days of its operation comprised almost entirely university members; Silver 1990), through its requirement of institutions to establish formal quality assurance procedures, and through the central control of the external examiner appointment system.

Expansion and diversity

Until the late 1980s, the former polytechnics and colleges were competing with the universities in a market which was still attracting a predominantly traditional student type: the school-leaver with A-level entry qualifications. The polytechnics had been established with a purpose different to that of the universities: to provide an applied and vocational higher education. However, Pratt and Burgess claimed in 1974 that the polytechnics and colleges had embarked on a process of 'academic drift', in an attempt to emulate the universities by moving away from the less prestigious part-time sub-degree work towards the full-time first degree. But emulation is only part of the story: student demand encouraged the polytechnics and colleges to move in this direction, and funding arrangements made part-time provision uneconomic. However, the differences between the polytechnics and colleges, and the universities were demonstrated in terms of what was offered (e.g., new subjects to cater for the rise of the service industries, and vocationally oriented degrees to provide graduates with skills and competencies for the labour market, albeit alongside traditional programmes/subjects), and how it was offered (e.g., in terms of

mode of study and more varied curriculum structures and methods of delivery).

The 1987 White Paper outlined the need for growth in higher education. This growth was targeted at non-traditional students and raising the age participation ratio among young people to counter the impending drop in the number of 18–19-year-olds. While the universities would continue to attract the better qualified traditional students because of their name and reputations, developments in the polytechnics and colleges – their flexibility of educational provision and traditional ties with their local authorities and communities – provided them with the means to attract the types of student targeted by the White Paper. (Between 1987 and 1995, undergraduate student numbers increased from 420,000 to 932,000. During that time, the former polytechnics and colleges almost trebled their student numbers from 223,000 to 605,000, and the universities increased their numbers from 197,000 to 327,000).[1] Since the 1960s, then, UK higher education has expanded in terms of the number and size of different types of university, in terms of the numbers of different types of student entering higher education, and in terms of the choices available to those students.

An additional feature of UK higher education, therefore, is its diversity as demonstrated by the varied cultures, histories, traditions, missions and organisation of institutions. It is also demonstrated by the characteristics of the student body those institutions attract, a body which now includes both traditional school-leavers and other non-traditional student groups. Students in the latter group are defined by their relative maturity, ethnic background, more varied entry qualifications and previous experience, their modes of attendance, and different needs and abilities. Other features of diversity include the development of curriculum content in terms of breadth of subject disciplines and the growth of specialisms and sub-specialisms, variations between programmes in the same subject disciplines, and new forms of collaborative provision involving, for example, further education colleges, work-based learning, interna-

1 Source: *Department for Education Statistical Bulletin*, Issue No. 17/94, November 1994, and Higher Education Statistics Agency data through the service provided by the Society for Research into Higher Education.

tional partnerships and so on. Responses by many institutions to a diverse and expanded student body have been to replace traditional curriculum structures based on the single subject linear honours with modular or unitised structures, and multi- and inter-disciplinary programmes offered in a variety of modes. Such developments have been supported by alternative teaching, learning and assessment methods such as independent learning and continuous assessment, and a move away from the traditional unseen end-of-year examination. These developments have raised issues for institutions, for example, in the operation of the external examiner system which is discussed later in this chapter.

In recent years, the changing nature of UK higher education has raised concerns about academic standards and their maintenance, partly because of the rate of expansion and diversity, and partly because central funding has not kept pace with the rapid increase in student numbers. These concerns came to a head in 1994 when the then Secretary of State for Education, John Patten, called for more attention to be given to standards and for greater explicitness about how they are defined and determined by institutions. As Brennan (1996, p.16) points out, 'standards in higher education have traditionally been implicit. Professors in great universities *knew* what they were. Those who were fortunate enough to be close to the professors could begin to understand what those standards were'. However, it is no longer acceptable to those with an interest in higher education (e.g., students, parents, employers of graduates, taxpayers and parliament) for standards to remain implicit in a mass system where the funding costs compete with other public and social needs. There need to be guarantees that standards are being maintained. Thus greater accountability for the central funds that higher education receives, more emphasis on both internal and external mechanisms to measure quality in higher education, along with the calls for more explicitness about what institutions provide, how they provide it, and what is produced as a result, have given rise to what this chapter has called 'quality management'. The rest of the chapter explores how quality management, together with expansion and diversity, has helped to expose issues and concerns about academic standards.

Quality management

Quality management, in this context, covers the quality terminology: control, assurance and improvement. It encompasses those processes, 'by which an institution discharges its corporate responsibility for articulating, maintaining and enhancing the academic standards of those activities for which it is responsible' (HEQC 1995, p.3). It also encompasses those external processes which have been developed to secure a measure of accountability from institutions for the public funds they receive. These include the processes operated by the funding councils, the HEQC, and professional and statutory bodies. This chapter focuses on the outcomes of the HEQC's quality audit of institutional quality assurance procedures, and quality assessment of educational provision at subject level by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Quality management has made issues about academic standards explicit. The relationship between quality management and academic standards is therefore an important one. Quality itself relates to those factors which impact on the student experience. Academic standards are those expectations which have been established for students to meet, and institutional quality assurance procedures are the means through which institutions can demonstrate to those with an interest in higher education (e.g., students, employers of graduates and government) whether or not they are meeting those standards. Quality, quality management and academic standards are therefore inextricably linked. It has already been pointed out that the increased emphasis on quality management arose from the demands for greater accountability as a result of the costs of the rapid expansion of the system. It also arose as a result of the UK's economic decline from the 1970s and the responsiveness of higher education to its restoration, and the restrictions on the growth of the social welfare state in general. As Stewart (1989, p.163) points out: 'The severities of the 1970s were the precursors to the deliberate contraction of the 1980s under a different government and a different economic theory' which was to promote the benefits of market forces, competition and selectivity.

The economic and political climate produced a new relationship between the universities and the government. It moved from one based on the freedom of the universities to determine

their own development, to one which grew out of a lack of trust and confidence in the ability of the universities to provide an education which was relevant and responsive to the needs of the country and the economy. As Becher and Kogan (1992,) note, 'higher education failed to convince government of its undisputed claim to do good by doing what academics wanted to do' (p.179). This new relationship resulted in the 1981 cuts to university funding, demands for greater efficiency and effectiveness in university management practices culminating in the Jarratt Report of 1985, and questions about academic standards resulting in the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals' codes of good practice for maintaining and monitoring standards. Trow (1994) defines this new relationship as managerialism imposed from outside the academic community to reshape and reform higher education through accountability. Thus the external environment (i.e., new market forces and demands for accountability – Trow's managerialism) and the consequences of the move towards mass higher education produced a new internal managerialist culture to cope with a hostile government, the cuts to funding, and the more complex academic and organisational structures emerging as a result of the internal expansion and diversity of individual universities (Scott 1995). As Dearlove (1995) states, internal managerial pressures were exerted because, 'doubts were expressed as to whether traditional collegial self-governance would be able to cope with the cuts and the calls for restructuring' (p.163). The polytechnics and colleges, on the other hand, were subject to local authority control of their estates, finances and personnel, and academic control of the Council for National Academic Awards. Thus, the polytechnics and (perhaps to a lesser extent) the colleges had more experience of managerial and bureaucratic structures, and these were strengthened by the 1988 Education Reform Act which granted the polytechnics and certain other institutions corporate status, ridding them of local authority controls.

During the 1980s, therefore, there was a general convergence towards greater managerialism across both the former sectors. As a result, academic standards and their justification, which were once the province of the individual academic, or group of academics, became subject to the scrutiny of university administrators. Added to this, the abolition of the binary system in

1992 resulted in new external processes for quality assurance and accountability. Trow (1994a) claims that the new unified system, 'created a large number of "universities" whose quality as *universities* cannot be assumed, but must be imposed from outside' (p.10). There are many in the academic community (and outside) who would agree with this statement. However, it is more likely that the external processes were a result of the government's 'lack of trust' in the universities in particular, the designation of the polytechnics as universities, which if they were to become universities had to be treated the same as the traditional universities, and the rapid pace of change within the system. The important point is that all institutions in the unified system were to be accountable to the new funding councils for the quality of their educational provision and research, and to the HEQC – through self-regulation – for the effectiveness of their institutional quality assurance procedures. So not only were academics and their standards being subjected to internal scrutiny by university administrators, but to external processes as well.

Impacts and outcomes

Expansion and diversity have raised concerns about academic standards and calls have been made by the government to make standards more explicit through quality management, both internal and external to institutions. External processes operate on the principle that individual institutions have responsibility for the quality and standards of their educational provision and awards, and the internal processes are the means through which academic standards are shown to have been met or not. Attempts by the HEQC to make academic standards more explicit have raised more questions than answers about definitions, consensus, comparability and potentially fitness of purpose (HEQC 1995). What these attempts have achieved, however, is to highlight the diverse nature of UK higher education in terms of the different purposes and missions of individual institutions, the differences between subject disciplines, and the differences between students' prior achievements, experiences and abilities. Thus what this work *has* confirmed is that there is no gold standard, but different academic standards.

Moreover, the outcomes of quality audit have noted the reliance that some universities place on the external examiner system as the main mechanism for maintaining the academic standards of their awards (HEQC 1994c). However, quality audit and a number of studies in the 1980s and 1990s have highlighted deficiencies in the external examiner system as a means of maintaining and comparing academic standards across the higher education system. Recent studies have concluded that the external examiner system is unable to make comparisons of academic standards across and between subjects and institutions because of the diverse nature of higher education, the logistics in doing so in an expanded system, and the lack of consensus about academic standards (HEQC 1996; Silver, Stennett and Williams 1995). Thus given that academic standards do vary, questions have to be asked about whether this matters or not, and to whom.

Questions such as these are being raised by the assessment of the quality of educational provision of subject disciplines as conducted by the HEFCE. Although the HEFCE (1994) claims that the setting and maintenance of academic standards are not part of its brief, the media have not been slow to link the outcomes of the Council's quality assessments with standards. One national newspaper has reported the, 'stark evidence of how some universities are diluting standards in the switch to mass higher education...emerging from a stream of official reports on the quality of teaching and learning' (*Daily Telegraph* 1996). Moreover, the Council's quality assessments have highlighted differences in quality between the former sectors of higher education, with 46 per cent of pre-1992 university provision found to be 'excellent' compared with only 11 per cent in the former polytechnics and colleges sector (HEFCE 1995). Whether this says anything about variations in UK academic standards is difficult to prove given that the HEFCE claims not to focus on standards. However, a major question that it does raise is the extent to which the diverse nature of UK higher education is being tolerated and understood.

Concluding remarks

A diverse and expanded higher education system has meant that it is no longer possible to sustain any notion of a UK gold standard. Standards are different because institutional purposes vary, and programme aims and objectives will cater for the differing needs and abilities of students and the demands of industry and commerce. Different standards have probably always been a feature of UK higher education. However, expansion and diversity have magnified these differences, and quality management has helped to expose them. Whether these differences can be defined as 'hierarchical gold standard relativism' or 'parallel relativism' (Barnett 1992) is not an easy question to answer – and any answers would depend upon the criteria, and who sets them.

UK higher education still rests upon the traditional paradigm of the university as characterised by the pre-1992 universities. And because of the influence of this paradigm, there are dangers that any successful future attempts to make standards explicit may lead to claims that anything different from that paradigm must be of poorer quality and lower standard. Experiences elsewhere might offer insights because, as Zellick (1996) points out, 'unless we can accept that there will be different kinds of people entering HE, [higher education] we shall suppress diversity and imperil academic standards'. In the USA, for example, the Ivy League universities co-exists with the community colleges as part of the same higher education system, and it is recognised and accepted that standards will be different. Ewell (1984) has argued that, 'different kinds of institutions are in vastly different businesses and ought, therefore, to be held responsible for different things' (p.6). Even though he is writing about US higher education, many in UK higher education would recognise and acknowledge this statement. The external bodies would argue that this call is being met. But the extent to which such uniform, and uniformly applied, arrangements can be sensitive to institutional differences without decontextualising purpose and function, and whether they can be undertaken without recourse to scores and rankings culminating in rewards, threats and punishments, is a debate which will continue.

The problem in the UK lies in the fact that the higher education system has always maintained, and believed publicly (but

not necessarily privately) that standards are comparable. It also seems to be assumed (or feared) that, as pointed out by an American, an institution's standards, if they are lower, will automatically threaten the standards of those institutions reputed to be centres of excellence (Trow 1991). Standards vary because of diversity and expansion. They will not be comparable because of the extent of diversity and because of the shear size of higher education in the 1990s. However, while many will argue for differences to be tolerated, the current market policies forcing competition and selectivity between institutions for students and funding will determine the question as to whether those standards are acceptable to potential students and graduate employers.

Chapter 4

The UK's External Examiner System
Its Rise or Demise?

Ruth Williams

Introduction

The UK's external examiner system has operated at the undergraduate degree level in some form or other for over the past 100 years. Virtually no other higher education system in the world has an external examiner system such as the one operated in the UK, except some of the former British colonies. Reasons for this are to be found in the historical contexts of higher education systems. For example in continental Western Europe, the tradition until recently has been one of strong state control of higher education, and in the USA market forces play a major role in the quality assurance of the system. In contrast the UK's higher education system has developed out of what van Vught (1993) calls the, 'self-governing community of fellows...completely independent of external jurisdiction' (p.34). Thus the external examiner system is part of that self-governance which, until recently, has helped to lessen government intervention in UK higher education.

The traditional purpose of the external examiner system is two-fold: to ensure that degrees awarded in similar subjects are comparable in standard across higher education institutions, and to ensure that students are dealt with fairly in the system of assessment and classification (Silver, Stennett and Williams 1995). To perform these tasks external examiners are appointed from within and outside the academic community by institu-

tions to scrutinise the quality and standard of students' work, and to moderate assessment procedures and the awards' process in collaboration with the internal examiners. Academics who act as external examiners are normally appointed for their seniority, their experience and their expertise in the subject discipline. These attributes enable them to compare academic standards with those of their own institution and other institutions of which they have had experience. The system has traditionally operated on the basis of goodwill in that academics are expected to perform their external examining role alongside their own teaching and research duties at their home institution. In return they are paid a small fee and travel expenses by the receiving institution.

This chapter discusses the evidence of recent studies (Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) 1996; Silver *et al.* 1995) which demonstrates that the external examiner system can no longer sustain its traditional purposes in a mass and diversified higher education system. Yet despite this, the studies have also shown that UK higher education institutions wish to retain the system, albeit in a strengthened form. We look at the reasons why the system should be maintained and propose that a new role has been created for the external examiner as a buffer against the growing managerialism in higher education. In doing so and to set the context, the chapter first looks briefly at the history of the external examiner system and then explores the concerns about its effectiveness. Finally it concludes with some possible opportunities for, and constraints against, the future operation of the system.

The rise of the external examiner system: a brief history

The system has its roots in the late 19th century with the creation of the then Victoria University, which later became the Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester Universities (Silver *et al.* 1995). External examiners were used as extra hands in the examination process to mark scripts, but with the creation of Victoria University, their role evolved into one which guaranteed the University's academic standards in comparison with the ancient universities. This practice spread to other new universities joining the higher education system as, 'an accepted form of unregu-

lated practice' (Silver and Williams 1996), and for all institutions external examiners became one of the key mechanisms for ensuring institutional and departmental quality and standards.

The approval of external examiner appointments in the former polytechnics and colleges sector had been controlled by the Council for National Academic Awards since its inception in 1964. It was not until 1984, however, that a formal regulatory framework for external examining was introduced into the university sector by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP). This action was taken as a result of government concerns about academic standards and quality. It is also an example of a number of developments during the 1980s highlighting the growing pressures on universities from government to demonstrate greater accountability and more efficient and effective internal management processes. If the universities had not bowed to these external pressures, then it is likely that the government would have imposed its own mechanisms. The importance of this trend has been noted here and it will be taken up in more detail in a later section.

The external examiner system provides a number of benefits for the higher education system. First, external examiners are able to provide help, advice and information on developments elsewhere to the departments they visit. Conversely, academics acting as external examiners can also learn about new practices and developments in other universities. It is therefore an important means of networking and disseminating innovations and good practice. Second, external examiners, 'act as an external reference point and as an imprimatur for an institution's awards'; they can say what is acceptable, and what is not, by operating 'at the intersection of national academic policies, the academic standards of their subject area, albeit loosely defined, and the academic standards as defined by the receiving institution and the programme of study' (Silver and Williams 1996 pp.44–5). As Becher and Kogan (1992) have noted, the external examiner, 'not only provides public certification, but polices internal practice' (p.104).

However, despite the benefits, studies have shown that the external examiner system is no longer fulfilling its traditional purposes of ensuring comparability of standards across the higher education system and ensuring fairness to students. It is no longer a cohesive national system in the way that individual

institutions and departments use external examiners. The logistics involved in appointing external examiners are presenting institutions with difficulties in identifying and appointing appropriate external examiners *per se*, and in appointing appropriate external examiners from a dwindling 'pool' due to the increasing pressures on academics. These problems have been caused and exposed as a result of the move from elite to mass higher education.

The demise of the external examiner system

The external examiner system and its traditional purposes are a product of a higher education system which no longer exists. Higher education until the 1960s consisted of a small set of universities providing an elite higher education which Trow (1987) characterises as, 'a form of higher education marked by high selectivity, and staff–student ratios which allow close student–teacher relations, centering around studies at high levels of intensity and complexity, leading to degrees of high and recognised standard' (p.269). The external examiner system was therefore able to operate within its defined purposes because it belonged within the confines of an elite higher education. However, as higher education has moved to a mass system, institutions have struggled to sustain the external examiner system's traditional purposes in the face of expansion and increasingly diverse programmes of study, but without any national co-ordination and monitoring to ensure a measure of cohesiveness.

The developments which have given rise to a mass higher education and the innovations designed to meet its demands include some of the following:

- The student body has expanded and become more diverse; there are now greater numbers of students with varying entry qualifications, prior achievements, experiences, needs and abilities.
- Institutions have grown more diverse since the 1960s in terms of mission and purpose, student profile, size and provision.
- New subjects of study have been introduced (for example, nursing, leisure and tourism, media and

cultural, and hotel and catering studies), while other subjects have become broader, producing specialisms and sub-specialisms (such as business and management studies which include, for example, specialisms covering retail management, human resource management and European business management).

- New curricula structures (modularisation and unitisation) and reorganisation of the academic year (semesters) have been implemented in many institutions.
- New modes of delivery (including accredited work-based learning and collaborative provision with company in-house training schemes, further education institutions and foreign universities, for example) are available.
- Innovations in teaching, learning and assessment are replacing traditional methods.
- Less funding from central government and greater pressures on academics' time (e.g., to teach greater student numbers, to produce more research, to meet the demands of external accountability and quality assurance arrangements) are present in the 1990s.

The above developments have highlighted, through recent studies (HEQC 1996; Silver *et al.* 1995), first and foremost that it is no longer possible to claim that external examiners are able to maintain and compare standards across institutions. Some commentators would speculate that it was never possible because higher education has always been characterised by differences. However, in the 1990s it is recognised that the myth or illusion can no longer be sustained – comparing and maintaining standards has been made impossible by the sheer size of higher education, and by the codes of good practice which limit the number of external examiner appointments anyone can hold at anyone time to two, and hence the limit to the number of comparators available to them in judging academic standards (CVCP 1989; HEQC 1994). It has been made impossible by variations in the purposes and missions of institutions, and in the aims and objectives of similar programmes of study. It has also been made impossible by the variety of ways in which such

provision is delivered in terms of curricula structures and teaching, learning and assessment methods. (Compare, for example, the differences in provision of a university which is regionally focused and dedicated to vocational education for the local population with that of an internationally reputed research university dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge which attracts an international young student body of high calibre.) It is no longer possible, therefore, to claim that there is a 'national' standard across and between subjects and institutions whose purposes and aims vary to such an extent.

Second, external examiners can no longer ensure fairness to individual students because of the sheer weight of student numbers. Third, institutions have adapted the system to their own needs in meeting the demands of mass higher education by redefining their use of external examiners. Fourth, Silver *et al.* (1995) found that institutions select and appoint their external examiners from like institutions on the basis of their research traditions, their missions and purpose, and histories and so on, which has further fragmented the system. Developments such as these have raised questions about the continuation of the external examiner system. But the resounding response from the institutions consulted in the studies has been to support the system. The next section will explore some possible reasons why the system evokes such support.

Continuation of the system?

Scott (1984, quoted in Finch 1996) has stated that, 'the most important product of the medieval university was clearly the idea of itself as a university and the separation of intellectual authority from the political power on which this depended'. In other words academics were responsible for the development of their own subject disciplines without interference from university administrators and others outside their subject discipline. This idea has underpinned the historical development of the university where academic authority has traditionally been based on departmental and professional autonomy. However, the relationship between political power and intellectual authority is now in danger of being undermined by the external

demands for accountability, quality assurance and better management practices.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to focus on the changing nature of this relationship *per se*. The purpose is to speculate whether, at the departmental level, the importance of the external examiner system lies in its ability to act as a bolster for 'professional autonomy' and a buffer against the growing culture of managerialism, both internally and externally. Such speculation is based on the premise that in the past academics and their departments were able to ensure their professional autonomy and isolate it from *managerial* influences mainly because higher education was small, powerful and could command trust (Trow 1994b, emphasis added). In a small and powerful higher education system, knowledge of practice and developments elsewhere was common at the subject discipline level, and any possibility that quality and standards were in jeopardy could be self-regulated with the threat of exclusion from the subject discipline's peer community. Thus there was less need for intrusive management. This of course is not the case in the 1990s, given the demands of external accountability and quality assurance, the costs of an expanded higher education and its diverse nature. Hence the 'new managerialism' which has been imposed from outside the academic community with the effect of changing internal academic management cultures.

Managerialism is therefore a threat to professional autonomy. It transfers power and authority from academics for the subjects they teach and research to university administrators through internal accountability and decision-making processes. This transfer of power and authority is driven by the external requirements of accountability linked to decisions about funding, quality and standards. Therefore, a second strand to this speculation about the importance of the external examiner system lies at the institutional level. One might speculate that the system provides an important means for university administrators to demonstrate to the outside world the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance processes, and the assurance of their institution's quality of provision and academic standards. This relationship can be shown in Figure 4.1.

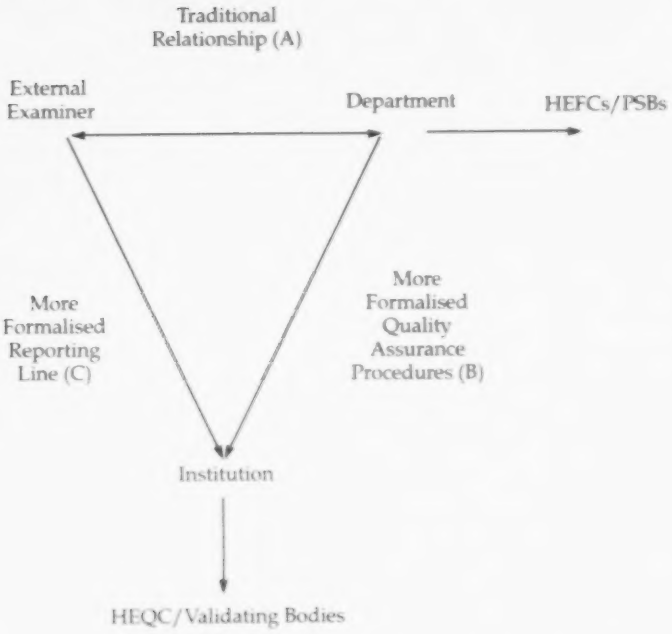


Figure 4.1 The relationship between the external examiner, the department and the institution

The relationship between the external examiner and the department has traditionally been a two-way process (A). The managerial trend, however, has introduced additional dimensions. First, at the institutional level, greater accountability has introduced more formalised quality assurance procedures between the department and the university (B). In many instances this new relationship has been reinforced by the more formalised reporting line between the external examiner and the institution (C). Second, external examiner reports and institutional procedures for the selection, appointment and work of external examiners are scrutinised through external processes. These processes include those as operated by the Higher Education

Funding Councils (HEFCs) through the quality assessment of educational provision at subject level, professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) through the accreditation of programmes of study, the HEQC through the audit of institutional quality assurance procedures, and validating bodies in order to determine whether or not quality and standards are being maintained.

How, then, might the external examiner system help to maintain professional and departmental autonomy against managerial influences? External examiners are an important part of quality assurance because they have traditionally provided legitimate certification that quality and standards are high (or not), first to the institution from the department, and second to external bodies and others with an interest in higher education (such as employers of graduates, students, parents and so on) from the institution. Even though the external examiner system is no longer able to fulfil its traditional purposes, examiners are still seen as legitimate in the sense that they conform to the classic definition of a 'peer'. For example, an *ideal* list of attributes which external examiners could be expected to possess might include some or all of the following:

- they have status and seniority
- they possess specialist knowledge and are therefore expert
- they make judgements based on moral authority which is the, 'shared membership, knowledge and values of the peer community' (Brennan, El-Khawas and Shah 1994, p.22)
- they carry the authority and legitimacy of the subject discipline
- they are objective because they are removed from the day-to-day politics of the university
- they operate within the bounds of institutional/departmental aims and objectives
- they offer advice based on developments, improvements and practice elsewhere.

Critics of the external examiner system might disagree with this list of attributes, citing departments who appoint 'friendly' academics from departments elsewhere and provide reciprocal

arrangements; or, at the other extreme, external examiners who, once appointed, will try to impose their own will and criteria upon a department regardless of the aims and purposes of the programme, department and institution. However, the extent to which these scenarios still operate has been mitigated by the increasing formality of institutional quality assurance procedures.

This chapter proposes that the potential value of external examiners has increased as a result of the UK's external arrangements for accountability and quality assurance in two respects. First, the arrangements 'inspect' an institution's/department's use of external examiners, their comments on the standard and quality of provision, and the actions taken on those comments. So, therefore, it is in an institution's/department's interests to ensure that the system is operating effectively and objectively, and that they make the best use of the external examiners. Second, both quality audit and quality assessment processes are based on a form of peer review which involves practising academics. Many academics would argue that their approaches to peer review do not represent the classic definition of a peer as described above. For example, many academics would question whether auditors as appointed by the HEQC and assessors as appointed by the funding councils are able to make judgements based on moral authority. Thus even though assessors, for example, may carry the authority of the funding councils, would they carry the authority and legitimacy to make judgements of those being assessed if they were perceived as more junior and were unknown members of the peer community? Unlike research, where peers are generally subject experts in the relevant field and are more likely to be visible to their peer community, teaching has a lower status and is therefore a less visible activity. Thus the identification of peers is not so easy in teaching, especially in a more diverse and expanded higher education system. Furthermore, assessors and auditors are trained to perform their roles. One might argue that as a result of such training, the peer is transformed into the inspector. While acknowledging that the purpose and role of external examiners, quality auditors and quality assessors are different, the importance of the actions and judgements of external examiners has

increased as a means of providing a balance and a check on 'quasi peer' actions and judgements.

The external examiner system has, therefore, become a means of maintaining a kind of balance between institutional/departmental autonomy, and external inspections on the one hand, and a defence against the encroachment of institutional managerialism on professional and departmental autonomy, on the other. Such autonomy, based on the idea that institutions (and the units that make up an institution) have the freedom to develop as they see fit, may or may not be a romantic illusion these days. But, as Becher and Kogan (1992) state:

> The classic and autonomous ideal of the government of higher education is one which has never been fully realised in any but a few prestigious universities let alone in the whole range of British higher education. We have associated it with the small and elite system that obtained before the large expansion of higher education in the 1960s. Its components, however, still remain recognisable and are regarded by many academics as denoting a value system and pattern of behaviour conducive to the most prized outcomes of higher education. (p.178)

The future: opportunities and constraints

The external examiner system, because it remains one of the key mechanisms through which institutions are able to ensure and demonstrate their quality and academic standards, is not necessarily in demise. Furthermore, it serves as an important means of ensuring a degree of departmental and professional autonomy against institutional managerialism and external scrutiny. However, its original purposes have changed. In a mass and diverse higher education system, the external examiner system as traditionally defined, like the emperor's new clothes, can never be a reality; the system provided an imaginary security until the effects of mass higher education and diversity exposed its deficiencies and weaknesses. The external examiner system *remains* a crucial part of institutional quality assurance machinery because it provides an important external reference point. However, in the 1990s it is no longer the *only* means of ensuring the quality and standards of assessment processes and awards.

At the individual academic level the system continues to bring benefits to the higher education system by providing academic interchange and networking. The benefits include, 'the degree of intrinsic interest in doing it, the reward of encountering other people's experience, the activity as a form of professional development, or the importance of taking part in a form of cultural cross-fertilisation' (Silver *et al.* 1995, p.13). However, there are constraints to the continued operation of the external examiner system. These constraints relate to the increasing pressures that academics are facing which mean that decisions to act as external examiners have to be weighed up much more carefully: time to do the job and to do it properly in the face of increasing student numbers and new methods of assessment, pressures to produce research publications, and pressures from the external demands for accountability and quality assurance, all of which lie side by side with the increasing teaching and administrative duties of the academic. The goodwill that supports the operation of the external examiner system, despite derisory remuneration, is being eroded in the face of increasing pressures on academics. If the system is to continue, and if it is recognised as an important mechanism for maintaining a degree of professional and institutional autonomy, then these are significant obstacles that will need to be tackled by institutions and the higher education system as a whole.

Chapter 5

Self-Assessment within the Quality Assessment Process

A Critical Perspective

Peter de Vries

Introduction

One of the key components of quality assessment regimes in higher education is the requirement that the department (school, unit or other sub-section within an institution) being assessed should conduct a self-assessment of its educational provision. This self-assessment could be for external assessment purposes, internal to the department itself and/or for administrators of the higher education institution. The received view is that self-assessments are carried out to serve two purposes: to give an account of the education being delivered – of how resources have been deployed – and to provide information to the department to enable it to enhance the quality of the education it is providing. To achieve these purposes, the whole department is expected to engage in a process of self-examination of their processes for delivery, and the main, and usually the only, criterion that departments are expected to use for the activity is the objectives they set for themselves. The procedure outlined results in a self-assessment report that is submitted to one of the responsible bodies, such as the Higher Education Funding Council. (Except in the final section, this chapter will concentrate only on those self-assessments which result in a document being published within or outside the institution which could result in threats, rewards and punishments). If it is submitted to an outside agency, it will be used to inform a subsequent assess-

ment process; whereas if it is for internal use, it could form part of a quality management regime of which reporting is a key aspect. It is expected to be followed up by the department making changes – improvements – to existing practices in the light of findings. This all seems rather logical, reasonable and a sensible way of going about business. But these are the surface realities based on a functionalist view of how things work. It is not the only view. A below-the-surface view of self-assessments reveals that there are other pressures and purposes that self-assessments serve which mediate the process in different ways. These other functions serve to subvert the original purposes of self-assessment as academics use the occasion to pursue their own interests. The way in which their values, needs and desires, as well as the social processes which impinge on their academic lives, structure self-assessments will be illustrated below.

Self-assessment as compliance

The introduction of the quality management ethos into higher education institutions has precipitated widely disparate reactions from the academic community. Many have embraced the culture wholeheartedly and have pursued its processes with alacrity, whereas at the other end of the spectrum, there are academics who have rejected it as an ideological construct which does not enhance the teaching and learning function. To them, processes such as self-assessment within a quality management regime place an unnecessary extra burden on the increasing academic load, and encroach on scarce research and consultancy time for minimal benefit. Despite these objections, bodies – externally, such as funding councils, and internally, such as university administrations – are requiring academic departments to undertake self-assessments of their educational provision. These requirements frequently result in academic departments carrying out self-assessments for compliance' sake. To differentiate between a full-scale self-assessment as described by Brennan, Frazer and Williams (1995) and a self-assessment for compliance, the latter will be referred to as a 'write-up'.

Typically the task of doing a write-up will be undertaken by an academic member of the department with extensive knowledge of its activities over time. The scribe will sit down and write the 'self-assessment' and pass it on to colleagues for comment. The purpose of this form of self-assessment is to discharge the department's obligation as quickly and as painlessly as possible. Many of the self-assessments submitted in the 1993–94 subject assessment exercise of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) conformed to this pattern (personal communication with academics 1994–95). The alternative, though, if done diligently could take up to six months or longer of academic time to complete (Brennan *et al.* 1995), as it involves the department in meetings, discussions and detailed analysis of all the processes involved in academic delivery. Considering all the other demands made on the academic community to carry out research, engage with employers (HEFCE reports passim), determine student opinion and make their teaching student-centred – against the backdrop of rising student numbers and an increase in the number entering higher education ill-prepared for study – many departments have eschewed the six month-long self-assessment. Besides, the funding councils 'encouraged' departments to provide write-ups in the 1993–94 quality assessment exercise by providing insufficient time for full-blown assessments to be carried out before assessment team visits. Moreover, the format and content of write-ups are so similar to full self-assessments that it is not easy to distinguish which of the two processes has been undertaken to produce the final document.

As write-ups have been encouraged and accepted in lieu of self-assessments, one needs to consider why so much store is placed on the process and why it is regarded as an integral part of the internal or external quality assessment process. The requirement that they be performed could be viewed as another form of compliance, this time by the assessing agency. The assessors used by funding councils are aware that they are reading write-ups as they are academics themselves and engage in the same process, and so must the councils that request these documents in view of the short time they give to produce them. This raises the question as to whether it is realistic to expect departments to change their educational provision in the light

of the findings of their write-ups. Real change requires valid information which the process currently in use is unlikely to provide.

Self-assessment as a political act

First, it is in the interests of higher education institutions to promote their image as providers of quality education and research; but in so doing they are reliant on academic departments to promote that image severally. This situation makes the self-assessment process for outside assessment a hostage to fortune: individual departments can hijack the occasion and hold the institution to ransom. For example, in the 1993–94 HEFCE quality assessment exercise, departments were asked to rate themselves as excellent, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. They were then assessed by teams of HEFCE assessors in the same field of study to determine the validity of their claims. (The process was more involved than this, but it has been simplified for the purpose of the argument.) If an academic department wished to acquire more resources, it could refuse to co-operate with an institutional request to rate itself as excellent. This occurred on at least three occasions to the author's knowledge in respect of departments requesting additional staff (personal communication with senior administrative staff in higher education institutions, 1994). In one instance, the university administrators capitulated to the department and provided it with extra staffing. This illustrates the power of academic departments to use such occasions to their own advantage (Weiss 1991), and emphasises the fact that the self-assessment process, as it is open to public scrutiny, will also be used for purposes other than those intended when commodities such as resources are scarce.

Second, departments can and do use self-assessments as a vehicle for co-opting assessors to their viewpoints. In their analysis of the recommendations made in HEFCE published reports, Brennan, Shah and Williams (1996, p.13) found that 14 per cent of the recommendations made by assessors were concerned with resources. The author of this chapter did not have access to the self-assessments to which the assessment reports referred to determine whether the departments concerned used

their self-assessments as a vehicle for co-opting assessors to their cause; however, he found in a scrutiny of ten other self-assessments that departments had developed strong arguments for more resources. Consequently, one should consider self-assessments as not being divorced from the total institutional political process. On the contrary, academics do use these platforms to further their own sectional interests by placing pressure on institutional administrators in their competition with one another for scarce resources.

Self-assessment for survival and reputation

Some of the academic departments that are required to undertake self-assessment are self-financing institutions, such as business schools, which usually have their own mechanisms for self-reflecting on their educational provision. Besides carrying out their main teaching function, their principal purpose in performing quality management self-assessments is not to reveal the 'truth' about the quality of their educational provision but to 'stay in business'. One could envisage the issue of survival as a point on a continuum of outsiders' perceptions of the viability of an academic unit, and at the other end of the scale one would place the concept 'reputation'. When a department has earned a reputation for research, teaching and scholarship among its peers and the wider community, it needs to safeguard its reputation so that it continues to attract students, consultancies, research grants and invitations to participate in scholarly occasions. Consequently, it would not be in the interests of the departments at either end of the continuum to portray themselves as deficient in any respect, even though assessment agencies request them to be critical about their attempts to provide excellent education. For example, de Vries (1995a) in interviews with academics on their HEFCE quality assessments, was informed that assessors had 'thrown back' at them issues mentioned in their self-assessment which had not yielded the expected outcomes. They were disappointed that these 'negative' aspects of their provision had been pounced upon by assessors and used as 'evidence against' them in published assessment reports. This was damaging to the reputation of the department that needed to create a pristine image of quality to

a wider public. The respondents intimated that they would in future not be self-critical in their self-assessments. Here one sees a clash between purposes: the purposes of the assessment agency versus the purposes of the department, exacerbated by the publication of the self-assessments. This is a case of an essentially private matter being placed in jeopardy by the requirement for it to be placed in the public arena.

The published summaries of HEFCE assessments report that many self-assessments are not written in a self-critical vein (HEFCE *passim*). This implies that what is being portrayed is not a self-assessment but a text which emphasises successes achieved and down-plays, or even ignores, the difficulties and problems experienced by departments in delivering the curriculum. In other words, they are promotional documents. Given the value of a good final assessment for their reputation, one could not expect academic departments to adopt a different approach. Yet the implications for the self-assessment are that, as a source of information to assessors, it has severe limitations.

Self-assessment other than for self-enhancement

One of the principal purposes cited for undertaking self-assessment is that the assessee department will use the findings to enhance its processes. This is a representation of reality based on notions of technical rationality. A key aspect of this way of thinking is that its propagators postulate a seamless process between departments obtaining information from their self-assessments and their taking action on it. An observation of the knowledge dissemination campaigns used to prevent drink-driving, misuse of harmful drugs, pollution of the environment and sunbathing alert us to the fact that people do not necessarily act on research and evaluation findings even if such action is viewed to be in their best interests. One way of viewing the problem of using self-assessments for self-enhancement is to conceptualise it as two processes: one is that of obtaining and supplying information to members of a department, and the second is taking decisions on that information. The self-assessment process is concerned with obtaining and supplying information. This is a distinctly different process from taking decisions. First, one needs to bear in mind that all the academics

in a department are unlikely to be of a common mind on the nature of the curriculum and how it should be delivered (a point elaborated on below). One would expect them to contest the self-assessment findings if these did not accord with their visions of reality. Members of departments will have their own sources of information on what and how to teach – their own common-sense explanations based on their values, expectations, wants and desires – which will be competing with the results of the self-assessment as to which should be accepted as valid. Second, there are political pressures of the kind mentioned above – such as reputation – that can and do have a profound effect on whether the self-assessment findings are accepted by individual members and, if accepted, how, when and whether they will be implemented. These reflect different degrees of commitment of the academic staff concerned with implementing suggested changes.

Disagreement about judgements

The perspectives of academic departments of the value of the education they are providing for students do not always accord with that of external assessors. The judgements of worth by departments are made on the basis of their self-reflections, self-study or self-assessment. By contrast, the assessors not only use the departments' self-assessments, but also evidence from their other observations to arrive at a judgement. Examples of lack of congruence occurred frequently in the history, chemistry and law subject assessment exercises carried out by the HEFCE in 1993–94 (*The Daily Telegraph* 1994). In history, 57 of the 87 departments classified themselves as excellent, whereas the assessors decided that only 17 merited this classification; the comparable figures were 44 of the 62 chemistry departments and 28 of the 67 law departments regarding their provision as excellent, whereas in the assessors' judgements 12 and 19 were the official scores. One could consider the discrepancy in judgements in two ways. First, the departments could be viewed to be overvaluing their teaching in an attempt to influence the judgements of the assessors. They could have been acting in this way as the benefits from attaining a high level of assessment in terms of reputation among peers and prospective students are

high. Second, one could postulate that the departments had erred in their judgements of the worth of their educational provision. On the other hand, many departmental members would also have been acting as external examiners and assessors in their own right, and would thus be familiar with the processes in sister departments and would be just as able to fell a judgement on the worth of their educational provision as the outside assessors. There have, consequently, been many criticisms in the press of the assessors, the assessment process and of judgements made, for example that the funding councils use more junior members of staff who lack experience and credibility. We thus have competing views of reality, but the official one triumphs as the power of the funders confers a form of legitimacy to their assessors' judgements, criticisms of the judgements of assessors need to be negated, and their ability as judges needs to be reinforced by officialdom to give credence to the process, irrespective of whether or not it is valid.

Self-assessment as a contestation over values

Self-assessments which result in a published report of some kind have embodied within them one point of view on what the department is trying to achieve and how it should achieve it (de Vries 1995a). However, unanimity of purpose is highly unlikely, as values between members differ and are not always reconcilable when members remain true to their ideological stances. This can lead to compromise decisions being taken on what to present and how it should be presented. Alternatively, those members with power may impose their particularistic viewpoint on the self-assessment. This contestation between members is most likely to occur on the issue which structures the self-assessment – the objectives – as the basic purpose and means of attaining outcomes are issues in which value judgements are embedded.

The effect of carrying out a self-assessment when there is a compromise over objectives or when dissentient values are ignored is that members of the department will participate with varying degrees of enthusiasm or not at all. There is also unlikely to be group ownership of the final document or allegiance to the values adopted within it. This has implications for the sub-

sequent assessment by outside assessors, for the acceptance of the results and the uniform implementation of improvements within the department. The concept of 'self' in self-assessment is thus, in many cases, a misnomer for the activity, as there is always more than one person involved in the activity and unless there are unusually compliant individuals in a department, the self-assessment will inevitably be a bone of contention and of limited value to those who oppose it or oppose the direction it takes.

An alternative model for self-assessments

If funding councils and administrators in higher education genuinely hope to effect improvements in education by asking academic members of staff to engage in self-reflection on their educational provision, they should eschew self-assessment as discussed above as the method. The public nature of the activity, the values embedded in it and the nature of the stakes involved make it an unsatisfactory method, in most cases, to rectify real causes of unsatisfactory provision. Consequently, surface issues are brought to the fore and the covert remain intact. The result is that cosmetic enhancement is often effected and the losers are the students and the education process itself.

An alternative model is that self-assessment should be an individual and a private activity. By making it individual, one does not have the contestation over values imposing on the process. Moveover, by making it private, one eliminates the competition and the striving for reputation from the process. The main caveats, though, are that administrators need to provide time for academic members to carry out self-reflective processes in their own way, to give them space to effect the enhancements as they deem suitable and, lastly and most importantly, to trust the individuals. There is, as shown above, no viable alternative to the trust model if genuine change is sought. Quality control of the process leads to a form of compliance which leads to satisfaction that the procedures for, but not necessarily the purpose of, the activity have been met.

A genuine self-reflective process does not necessarily result in a report, and especially not in a well-structured written report. This may be the means for some individuals to record the results

of their deliberations, but it is not necessarily the only outcome. Written reports carry the stamp of compliance. By contrast, individuals who engage in self-reflection may wish to make notes for themselves as reminders of the changes they intend to implement when the time and occasion are opportune. These may be mental or written notes; the choice should be theirs as they are the ones who are doing the reflecting and will be making the necessary improvements to their teaching.

However, the self-reflective process is also open to criticism. We are often vulnerable to a measure of self-deception, based on our inability to be objective about ourselves. To a great extent this is determined by our level of knowledge and experience of other situations. Academics who have acted as peer reviewers to sister departments are provided with alternative scenarios against which they can compare their own provision. This does not, however, discount the problem of mindset, of individuals seeing what they wish to see and having fixed ideas about what is and is not good education. There is no panacea for changing mindset, though one would hope that, with extensive academic interchange and debate on educational issues, fixed ideas will change. It thus behoves individuals to make use of many opportunities in which they can exercise their individual judgements on education in their disciplines to enable them to hone their skills and find challenges to their ideas, and it is incumbent on administrators to facilitate such academic interchange.

Conclusion

It could be inferred from the above argument that self-assessment, as it is currently carried out as part of the quality management of higher education, is not a value-neutral activity. It is not value-neutral as it is an integral part of the quality management ideology which holds that academic processes in higher education should be managed. Like all ideologies, quality management in higher education masks the contradictions and inconsistencies in its processes which conspire to work against it in the optimal fulfilment of its objectives. Nevertheless, it is being implemented in higher education institutions. In some cases, the activity is being carried out to comply with the dictates of quality assessment regimes, and in others because there is a

genuine belief that the activity will lead to the enhancement of the education provided. There are conditions under which the latter expectation will be realised, but the evidence shows that real change is unlikely to ensue and that the implementation of the process brings with it a host of attendant unwanted problems.

PART III

Lessons for Teaching: the Four Cs of Higher Education

Chapter 6

The Four Cs of Higher Education

Kjell Raaheim

Introduction and some theoretical considerations

Although one is frequently reminded that the best way of looking at the relationship between teacher and students is to regard the former as someone who is there to help the latter to teach themselves, the feeling still remains that the teacher is somehow responsible for both the starting and the completion of the learning process. And so, in this chapter, an attempt will be made to look upon the tuition situation of today in a somewhat 'old fashioned' way, with the aim of clarifying and specifying the 'duties' placed upon the teacher, as the one in charge, as far as the outcome of the learning efforts of those placed in his or her care is concerned.

There can be no doubt, in my opinion, that new ways of arranging the learning situation are decided upon by teachers, or some other party which likewise sees itself as responsible for the final results. Also, when new curricula are decided upon, it is seldom the voice of students that is most frequently heard, or the wishes or preferences of beginners that are taken as the point of departure. The whole *learning environment*, which must be considered the most important concept where learning results are concerned, is in our time seldom created with any real participation from those who find themselves there in order to learn as best they can under the circumstances provided.

A few years ago, when John Radford and I were asked to give a series of lectures to members of staff in the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Bergen, Norway, my colleague placed a strong importance upon the attitude of a teacher to-

wards his or her students, whenever the question of the outcome of learning efforts or other tasks was focused upon. He reminded the audience of the effects of the inspiration of some great leaders in history, most notably Admiral Nelson, who made his sailors feel that he related to them personally. The 'Nelson effect' – in the form of some extra effort to do one's best – ought not to be seen as some way of making the members of (larger) groups seriously believe that their leader knows each and everyone by name, even in cases where there are hundreds of students in the lecture hall. Rather it is the feeling of an attitude on the part of the leader that may be explained as a genuine *wish* of a relationship of such intimacy.

The importance of various factors in the relationship between teachers and students has been most clearly demonstrated by Noel Entwistle *et al.* in the UK. Since the early studies of the 1970s Entwistle has consolidated his insight in central factors of teaching and learning at university through a number of studies (Entwistle 1981; Entwistle and Ramsden 1983; Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle 1984). When I learned about Entwistle's studies, I in my own research took notice of some key concepts in his reports of students' descriptions of the 'good teacher'. *Enthusiasm* and *concern* never failed to be included among the personality traits valued by the students of various institutions of higher education. Factors like these also seemed to form the better part of attempts to explain some rather astonishing results of 'learning experiments' at the University of Bergen (see, e.g., Raaheim, Wankowski and Radford 1991). Of the two concepts, concern has since, for various reasons, seemed to be the most important.

Was it not also Nelson's concern that did the trick, and for that reason must it not be seen as the most fundamental factor where the source of good leadership is concerned? Or is it, perhaps, more likely that this attitude comes second to, or as a logical result of, enthusiasm on the part of the leader?

Nelson obviously enough had the challenges and visions of great battles and victories before him. And his ideas could simply not be turned into life without the fullest of support from his men. The *means* of securing support may vary among leaders. His was a friendly attitude towards the sailors. But what, then, about the successful tutor at some highly acclaimed learn-

ing institution? What is his or her concern for the students really based upon?

The scholar who has been given the task of tutoring someone is likely to be a person who has some definite idea(s) within the subject in question, be it some simple or more complex knowledge or perhaps even such a thing as a 'truth' that he or she has come to see. Provided you are someone who likes to share the truth with your fellow human beings – if you are not such a person you are perhaps not ideal as a tutor – you will look for ways of establishing contact with the student(s) in question. Your first concern, of course, is the presence of those you are going to teach. And not only their mere presence, but their being willingly attentive and ready to receive your message.

In looking back upon the various 'teaching exercises' of my own career as a researcher in higher education, I must admit that the single student, as a particular individual, was not always the object of my concern. In some cases the groups of students that I was trying to teach were there just to prove a point, such as that 'normally gifted' students will be able to pass a particular exam, provided that the learning situation is organised in a proper way. This goes to show that the 'leader' of the learning process, be it a lecturer or a tutor, in order to become motivated to feel concern for the students and to arrange for good ways of picking up new knowledge, does not need to be in the possession of a particular truth within some subject in order to inspire the students in their learning efforts. It may be sufficient that he or she is highly motivated to get the learning process underway, irrespective of content.

Both in a situation where the leader of the group of learners has some particular subject matter that he or she wishes to convey to the students, and in the case of mere attempts to prove some points about the learning process itself, might the leader's enthusiasm turn out to be strong enough to make the students feel that the teacher is really concerned about their progress? This concern may well be felt as a concern for the individual, since, in the end, this is precisely what it is.

There are cases where the enthusiasm that comes to produce a natural concern for the learners is strengthened by some external force, so to speak, as for instance if the teacher somehow feels that the students in question are particularly worthy of his

or her (extra) teaching efforts. As one example I might mention a group of students from the 'third world', who initially had been almost totally neglected at a certain university in Norway, and who were later (to make up for this) invited to a specially prepared course, in psychology, as the subject happened to be. The learning results proved to be striking, with a 5.5 per cent failure, as against 61.1 per cent previously (Raaheim 1987, 1992; Raaheim and Raaheim 1996). As another example I might mention a situation where it was discussed, at the University of Bergen, whether or not all of the first year students were really 'fit for studying at university', and where an initial examination (named Examen Philosophicum) was thought to be a proper selection mechanism. When a group of (enthusiastic) teachers, in which yours truly could be found, decided to put in extra effort in order to prove that 'every honest student will succeed', again some rather sensational learning results were obtained. Out of a total of 904 students, 895 passed the examination. For good measure, it turned out that none of the nine students who failed could be found among the names on the list of participants in the course (Raaheim *et al.* 1991).

Teaching in larger groups: the problems of contact, contract, consultancy and co-ordination

Enthusiasm and concern are concepts that lend themselves to prescriptions of ways of obtaining good results in almost any field of human interaction. To get the message across, both the actor and the lecturer must behave in accordance with such notions. However, where the present tuition situation in higher education is concerned, there are some extra points of practical importance to be considered. They are here named the 'four Cs' of higher education, simply as a memory aid.

1. The contact *that needs to be established between the teacher and those being taught*

Whenever someone is a member of a group of 10 to 15 people, say, it is only a matter of (a relatively short) time before everyone has learned a little about his or her fellow group members. This applies to the leader as well as the other members of the group.

With a group of 200 to 500 members it is another story. And in some universities today, even bigger numbers are found, especially in introductory courses for new students. Sometimes also one single person, be it a professor or not, is given the task of leading the learning operation towards the goal of passing some kind of entrance examination. What about a situation, then, where actually some 800 students line up to take part, as was the case in my own university in Norway in the 1970s?

Let us look at the challenges ahead, both from the position at 'the top' and from that at 'the bottom'. A leader to whom the provisions of the armed forces come to mind, may come to reflect upon the starting point of a military operation or a training programme for new recruits. Traditionally a huge number of men was of course what any army officer would like to see, when the task ahead was that of confronting an enemy on the battlefield. The academic leader is perhaps more often than not unlikely to see any advantage in having a small army in his or her command, but this is not to say that some consideration about the ways and means a successful commanding officer might employ would not be useful.

Looking at the situation from the other end, the new student often tends initially to feel completely lost, and perhaps for as long as the large crowd of beginners forms nothing but an unorganised group, with people looking in all directions for advice and information.

This is a situation at university in which I have found myself as an outsider, so to speak, on a large number of occasions, from the latter part of the 1960s, at least, when in Norway we were first confronted with numbers of new students that seemed almost to double every year. One was less encouraged by the authorities *to do something about it* in those days. Only some 20 years later were we given the actual command to organise some effective learning operation in which all new students should be included.

But if you are gently, or not so gently, told to take charge of such an operation, it may prove worthwhile to simply take a look at the way one goes about the handling of large numbers of people within the military forces. And here I am not primarily thinking of the structure of the organisation and the way orders are passed from top to bottom. From my own days of national

service – with some reminders from time to time after that – I was struck by the fact that here could be found very effective methods of passing on information. As an instructor, given the task of explaining how some gun or piece of machinery was built up or had to be used, one was expected to apply certain 'learning principles', which seemed to be based on ideas derived from research in the psychology of perception, learning and thinking. I had seen nothing like it in my earlier days at pre-university school, and to this day I have seen less awareness of basic psychological knowledge at universities and other institutions of higher education.

The mere organisation of the whole campaign to pass on knowledge to some 500 people seems to be an overwhelming task at university. Teachers seldom work together to share teaching tasks, and if you sometimes see an admiral or a general about, there may be some second-in-command to be found also, but rarely captains, lieutenants or the like, not to speak of sergeants and corporals.

As the military structure (for many a good reason!) has not been officially introduced at university, there is, as a consequence, no fully organised scheme to cater for a splitting up of the learning campaign into sub-tasks to be given to personnel of various ranks. Money, by way of salaries, is also only found if some 'learning experiment' is set up, with a relatively short period of duration to ensure that the sums allowed are kept within reasonable limits. And even when the results of experimental efforts, along the lines of a military battle to fight the problems of mass education, are found to be strikingly good, there seems to be no possible way of letting them influence normal teaching practice.

A teaching campaign might prove to be nothing costly (since corporals and sergeants are likely to expect salaries well below their officers). The experiment referred to in the introduction to this chapter may serve as an example of a very cheap, and yet very successful, battle in the field of tuition in present-day universities. The solving of the problems of contact is, however, only the first part of the story behind the experimental results. More details will be added as we go along in the discussion of the four Cs of higher education.

The Examen Philosophicum has for generations been the first hurdle at university for the majority of Norwegian students. Formerly its three parts consisted of the history of philosophy, logic and psychology. At present – since the mid 1980s – psychology has been replaced by the philosophy of science. The workload on the part of the students is meant to be that of a half semester, which means that one is expected to take on some equally demanding learning task in order to have a normal workload for the first of the two semesters constituting one's first year at university.

The first and very simple measure taken was to arrange for a proper way for the students to sign up for the course. A special form was prepared, in the shape of a list of names filled in by the students themselves at the beginning of the first lecture, with space provided for marking each attendance for the weekly lecture through the 13 weeks or so towards the exam. The teacher made it clear that the main purpose of this exercise was not to control the movements of the students, but to secure a way of informing the teacher: were they all there, or had more than just a few decided to spend their time differently on a particular occasion or perhaps for the better part of the series of lectures?

The students were reminded of the simple fact that when someone is dissatisfied with a particular course – be it for reasons of content or because of dissatisfaction with the lecturer – it frequently happens that he or she reacts by not showing up. However, under the present circumstances, one very much wanted to get the students' reasons for absence down on paper, as a first step to possible future improvements of the course. So, would the students agree to putting the figure '1' after their name when present on a particular date, and some time later put down another figure for the time(s) they had been absent? With the agreement of the students, then, the figure '2' was to be used in cases of illness, '3' for having decided to spend the time differently on some occasion(s), for example by reading or attending some other lecture, and '4' when 'it just so happened' that they failed to come.

This suggested way of passing on information to the lecturer, who on his side had made it clear to the students that their presence – or absence – really was important to him, resulted in

a quite unexpected and also very dramatic change in the familiar 'attendance curve' usually obtained in 'normal' situations with no list of names. The great majority of the students turned out to be regular attenders, not missing any, or just one, of the lectures.

Critical voices naturally were heard on this occasion, as on others where something of an untraditional nature is being tried. Maybe the students, who were all new and unfamiliar with the rules and regulations of a Norwegian university, thought that an absence or two from lectures might somehow influence their marks at the exam. To get some idea of whether or not a fear like this was in operation, it was decided to repeat the exercise the following year, this time with no names taken down. This, of course, made it rather awkward to ask for reasons for absence, but since literally everyone seemed to be present every time, nothing much was lost by the change of procedure. The main thing seemed to be the stressing by the teacher of the fact that it really mattered to him whether or not the course was well received, and that he was always open for suggestions from the students as to ways of improving things.

As already mentioned, the full story of the remarkable examination results in the footsteps of the equally remarkable attendance figures, can only be revealed after a description of measures taken as far as the other Cs are concerned. In the meantime, while still dealing with the importance of good contact between teacher and students, I shall describe some further developments of the teaching experiments at the University of Bergen.

It is, perhaps, a point worth mentioning that the experimenters in this case were given great freedom in arranging for new or unorthodox ways of proceeding. These were large groups of students regarded as examples of crowds of people, in which one would be likely to find numerous students who would be unfit for university studies. And, indeed, as very few teachers were normally assigned to take care of the first year students, with people feeling sorry for those who had to do the job, there was a general readiness to accept the introduction of untraditional approaches. It was looked upon as only natural, then, when the experimenter/teacher of a first year group of about 300 psychology students asked for some money to hire a number

of slightly more advanced students as 'tutors', to be fitted into a plan of dividing the large group of students into sub-groups of about 10 to 12 people.

Here a substantial number of 'sergeants' appeared on the battlefield to take on the weekly training of the new recruits. But one also felt in need of something like a 'captain', under orders to attend the weekly lecture of the commander-in-chief, together with the full group of students. The captain of the actual case we are reporting upon was a mature student, who was preparing for his final examination for the Candidacy of Psychology, after some five to six years' study of psychology. He entered the operation partly to get data for his own thesis, to form part of his degree. His role in the learning campaign was, first, to take down the message from the commander, in the form of the main points or questions raised at the lecture. Having done this, he was to call a meeting with all the sergeants (who did not attend the lecture). His instructions were to pass on the message from the commander, with a specified operational plan to be carried out by his subordinates. The sergeants were also told to come and see him should any problems arise during the week, either about the message as such or about the way it ought to be conveyed to the privates of their own tutor group.

Serving as the commander in such a venture I have myself, on a number of occasions, been given proof that here at least is a line of command that would secure that a question from a student reaches the person at the top. I have also come to experience some rather unexpected side effects, which seem to show that students may come to feel that they belong to a very tight unit, in spite of its size. One example is that of a young man, who had been invited to take part, for a relatively short period of time, in an exchange visit to the US. Not wanting totally to miss the opportunity of having part of his curriculum lightened by the efforts of his local team of teachers, he turned to me for advice in looking for similar tuition possibilities while away on his visit to American universities. Not, perhaps, that he actually believed that it was possible for me to come up with some definite ideas of how to secure replacements for lectures missed while he was away. Rather it might be a way of telling me that there was, indeed, something he did not like to miss. Another example would be the girl who phoned her professor very late

on a Sunday evening to explain that she had just had word that her grandmother had died, and that she would have to travel across the country to attend the funeral on the day of the next lecture of the series. She somehow knew, I think, that I would not notice that she was not there among the 300 students in the lecture hall. But she obviously felt a need to tell me her reason for being absent.

Both students may have felt that they had a place to fill within a well-structured learning campaign. When unable to take part in a particular effort on the battlefield, for reasons beyond their control, they found it necessary to approach the leader at the top, to make sure that he knew that they would have wanted to take part. I never saw anything quite like this in the army, but I am open to suggestions that Nelson sometimes, or quite often, had experiences of an equivalent nature.

Some results from the above-mentioned exercise have been reported elsewhere (see, e.g., Raaheim *et al.* 1991). Again, the full story can only be told after having discussed the other Cs that were in operation. Suffice it to say that, so far, there is to my mind ample evidence that contact between the individual student and the hitherto distant figure of the professor in charge of a tuition programme may sometimes be established in a successful way, by very simple and well-known methods.

There is one more point to be made concerning the establishing of the necessary contact between teacher and students when large numbers of the latter are seen. It is, in my opinion, a very important one, and it concerns the role of the 'liaison officer'. In the course of my 25 years of experience within the field of 'experimental pedagogics', I have more than once seen how attempts to do without such a link between the lectures and the work in small study groups have led to uncertainty as to objectives, and to cases of near failure of the whole exercise, as sometimes problems of a practical nature are left unsolved. A sudden illness that hits some of the tutors, an imposed change in the timetable or some other triviality, may lead to a disruption in the work in the tutor groups that very likely would have been avoided if someone was there to be consulted, who had 'orders' to follow in each particular case. To serve in such a role must also be regarded as valuable training for future teaching tasks at university or elsewhere.

2. Contracts – *or the lack of them*

Most places of work in modern society are regulated by written contracts, which can be referred to should an employee, or an employer, step outside the normal bounds of behaviour. An apprentice has expectations of what will be taught or demonstrated, and will, if only gradually, come to realise his or her duties under various circumstances. At university, in some countries at least, the picture is a quite different one. Pre-university schools have not prepared the pupils for future roles as students. After all, who knows where the future lies. It is therefore only natural, perhaps, that the school leaves the task of explaining about the demands of various subjects of study to the institutions of higher education themselves. And so teachers at university who have the job of lecturing to newcomers find, as a rule, that there is a lack of knowledge among the students regarding ways of coping with university chores. However, you will find very little, in many countries, of what ought to be the natural consequences of this state of affairs. Only occasionally does one find well-prepared courses in study methods, and when it comes to the general introduction to university life, one might find that in a number of universities older students out of kindness take on the task of enlightening the newcomers as best they can.

While this is by no means a bad idea, it is not sufficient as a preparation for the work ahead – not if one wants to see students working efficiently from their first term onwards and wants good results from the start, that is quality as well as quantity, as we have put it in this book.

There are, of course, numerous things that a university teacher may take for granted as far as students' knowledge of proper ways of behaviour is concerned. Books on a given list are there to be read, lectures are to be attended, and so on. But even among such trivialities one may find examples of things that ought to be explained. Contrary to what was the case earlier, at school, the teacher at university may choose to present topics in a way that bears almost no resemblance to what is said in the textbook. He or she might even suggest that the book in question presents a totally wrong, or outdated, picture of some important issues. And some other issues, considered and also asserted by the lecturer to be of little or no importance, may prove to be quite

the opposite when it comes to the questions at the examination later on.

To mention briefly a related point: it may not be necessary, perhaps, to explain to the student that he or she now belongs to a group of independent and responsible 'grown-ups'. Nevertheless, it may tend to confuse the newcomers when a lecturer replaces the schoolteacher's 'This you *must know*' with 'You *must not believe* that this is the case'.

The lecturer knows that new students have not normally experienced the freedom of deciding for themselves which learning tasks to take on in a given week. This fact sometimes leads the lecturer to expect – and to be ready to forgive – that the students are unable to cope in a situation where they are asked to prepare their participation in a seminar, say, by going through some written material of their own choice beforehand. The students are perhaps told that a good part of a seminar is to be filled by individual presentations, and that the whole group will be looking for ways of learning something from these, irrespective of degree of perfection. But through my 40 years as a university teacher I have met quite a few lecturers who would tell you that in a situation like this one does well to have something up one's sleeve to fill the time that was intended to be spent in listening to presentations by students who, in fact, turn out to be absent on the day.

I have always felt that this leniency on the part of one who has set up the contract is badly misplaced. Admittedly a contract ought to be something different from a *demand* by the teacher in the form of a list of tasks and names on the blackboard. An atmosphere of mutual agreement is, of course, a necessary prerequisite as a basis for co-operation. But if this is somehow secured, the presence of the students on the day of the seminar ought to be viewed in the same light as that of the teacher.

At times, the greater freedom of all parties at university can also lead a teacher to overlook his or her part of a contract that has been set up, if not in so many words. I am thinking of essays that are not marked and returned to the students within a reasonable time. Clearly, if he or she expects the students to fulfil a given task within a certain time, the teacher ought to set an example that is worth following. There is, perhaps, reason to believe that the lack of sanctions in cases where a job is not done

on time is something very quickly discovered by new students. What then, if a teacher takes some pain in demonstrating an eagerness to keep to the letter of a given contract with the students?

In the case of the exercise with the problems of attendance, which was mentioned in the previous section, an attempt was also made to describe in detail the teacher's contribution towards the common goal: a successful examination result. With a group of about 900 new students there was, of course, no chance for face-to-face talks. The very simple solution to the problem of communication was to prepare a text on a sheet of paper, where the teacher's role was described in such a way that the students knew what to expect each week of the term. It was made clear, by way of an explicitly formulated guarantee, that no problem would appear on the day of the final examination that had not been discussed at some lecture or other in the course of the term.

With the teacher's task clearly described on the piece of paper handed to the students, the latter were asked to fill in the answers to a small number of questions regarding their own role. In general the students were asked about their intentions, for example did they plan actually to follow all of the lectures and in the end sit for the examination in the ordinary way, or were they perhaps only part-time students, wanting to sit in now and then to get some idea of the content of the course?

It turned out that the great majority of the students, in fact close to 100 per cent, expressed their wish to come to every lecture and then, naturally enough, to try to pass the examination. And this rather simple and tentative way of setting up a contract, in a situation where *contact* had already been established (see previous section), helped in keeping up the attendance to lectures throughout the term, and also must be part of the explanation why in fact 100 per cent of the attending students (in a group of about 900) passed the examination, a result I have myself never been able to replicate.

A group of about 900 new students is about the largest I have myself been able to 'hold together', when teaching psychology within the arrangements of Examen Philosophicum at the University of Bergen. While this was about the normal size of figure some 20 years ago, the number of new students more than

doubled in the following years, making it necessary to introduce parallel courses and in the end to set up separate courses for each faculty. And, as already mentioned, psychology is not any longer taught in these courses.

A few details of procedure with the exercise with the 900 students might perhaps be added. To get them all together at the start of the semester, the university made arrangements to rent a cinema of a proper size. But since there was a lecture hall large enough to cater for about 500 people, the weekly lecture had only to be repeated once each week to give everyone a chance to listen to the professor who was the commanding officer of the enterprise. The students were also offered participation in 'small' groups of 40 to 50 people, where lower rank 'officers' went through the various parts of the textbook in a way that paralleled the weekly lecture.

Figure 6.1 shows curves of attendance in four groups, the last three of which were led by a 'lieutenant', who to my mind perhaps showed more enthusiasm than the average lower rank officer. The curve of attendance in Group IV is especially worth noticing. On a Friday evening Norwegian students would normally find themselves in all sorts of places other than a lecture room at university. (If they are not on their way home to visit parents and friends, there are numerous other activities to choose between.) In this case, however, a large number of 'small' groups were set up, so as to make it impossible to avoid also using Friday afternoons. But with a contract set up between teacher and students, the situation might not have been thought of as a 'normal' one by either party.

In Scandinavian universities at least, the problems resulting from a lack of proper contracts have also been strongly felt where mature students are concerned. As more and more students are admitted to university for lower degree courses, more and more applicants for higher degree courses are seen year by year. Some 20 years ago, with relatively few students in the group to be guided towards a thesis, say, the university teacher – and the students – did not seem to need any formal contract to regulate their work. Misunderstandings and unforeseen delays were of course unavoidable, even in those days. In many cases one would find that a student spent more than a year of extra time to complete work on their thesis. But what was a

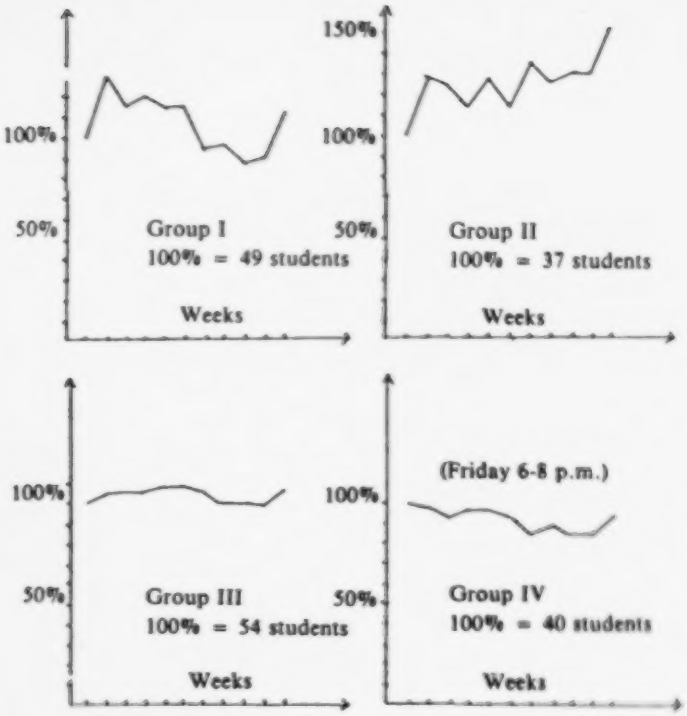


Figure 6.1 Attendance in four lecture groups in psychology, autumn term 1977.

somewhat irritating problem then, has developed into a disastrous situation today. In many departments there seems to be absolutely no way of coping with the endless queues of students who, through their successful mastering of lower degree studies, have simply earned the right to have a personal tutor assigned to them through their final degree courses and work with their theses.

In Norway the educational system is as follows: after 12 years of going to school from the age of seven (from 1997 to be 13 years from the age of six), young people who have read subjects of a

more 'academic' nature in the last years at school will be admitted to university regardless of marks at school. There is a common entrance examination (Examen Philosophicum) and some introductory courses in various fields. For some lines of study, very goods marks at pre-university schools *are* necessary, the School of Medicine being an example of this. Otherwise you may start within a field of study by taking a one year course. In a given field, such as psychology, the marks received in this course form the basis for further studies. Within social science, to give another example, you may go on to a second course. To complete a lower degree, you in this case need a third subject. One of the courses must be a three semester course (one-and-a-half years). If a student now wants to study for a higher degree, he or she would normally want to continue within the field of the longest course of the three previously taken. The marks received in that particular course determine whether or not the student is accepted for further studies. In this way the universities of Norway let 'everyone' in, only perhaps to stop the vast majority from going on to a higher degree in their chosen field. With very large numbers of students admitted in the first place, there may still be far too many at the higher level, of two more years. One problem is the lack of tutors, as already mentioned. Some faculties, such as that of Social Science at the University of Bergen, are today seen to announce the introduction of a formal contract between a department and the students, as far as help from tutors is concerned. This might be seen as an important step towards improving the working conditions of both students and staff. But it is also a most important point to note that such contracts have not existed in the past.

It is perhaps only natural, in the teaching situation of today, that when some researcher in the field of higher education points to ways of improving teaching and learning in the lower levels of study at university, very little enthusiasm is found among those of his or her colleagues who have teaching obligations at the higher levels. If by some miraculous touch you find a means of helping close to 100 per cent of the new students to pass an entrance examination – and perhaps with good results too – you have made your contribution to a considerable increase in the problems of capacity as far as both lower and higher degree courses are concerned. We shall come back to this point

later on, in the context of a concrete example from the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Bergen.

3. **Consultancy**: *The opportunity for students to consult someone who knows*

In many fields of life it is the most natural thing of all to turn to someone else for advice whenever there is a problem you cannot solve on your own. There are agencies working on a professional basis, as well as friends and older colleagues, and if at work, say, you as a newcomer did not ask for advice, you would probably be looked upon as someone who was unwilling to listen to others. At university and other institutions of higher education there is often a variety of tutors around, to help you choose between subjects where this is a possibility, or to inform you about the ways and means of a particular line of study. Even where learning difficulties occur, there may be a counselling unit to turn to, such as the pioneer one that existed at the University of Birmingham under the leadership of Janek Wankowski (see Raaheim *et al.* 1991). However, when it comes to the question of developing the skill needed to demonstrate your knowledge in a proper way, such as to express orally or in writing what you have learned within a given subject, you as a student will very often be left with the more or less educated guesses of other students you happen to know.

There is a wider agreement today than that found 20 years ago, that study skills can be developed so as to help a student improve his or her learning ability over time. However, the particular skill needed to demonstrate what you have learned in a proper way, you would at best acquire rather slowly, and perhaps only after some near failures during the course of your first examinations. Many teachers would agree that it *is* a question of skill where these matters are concerned, but would perhaps tend to regard them as secrets of the trade, so to speak. One cannot prevent students from picking up some 'dirty tricks' in coping with an examiner, but one ought not, of course, to encourage the students to do anything but face the situation at the examination with an open mind.

There are now courses in essay writing to be found in many institutions, but very little information seems to exist as far as oral presentations are concerned. This is perhaps only natural,

since the two ways of presenting knowledge are rather different when it comes to degree of standardisation of procedures. The essay you are asked to write takes some questions or problems posed as its point of departure and in a number of cases your fellow students are facing exactly the same task, presented on paper in an identical way. Not so with oral examinations, where very often quite different questions are put to the different students, and where the personality and experience of the examiner play an important role as far as the final result is concerned.

Since, however, oral examinations no longer exist at lower levels – in a lot of subjects and in many countries – one may be led to think that we are here discussing a question of very little importance. But the reasons for abolishing oral examinations – again in a lot of subjects and in many countries – have not always been of an educational nature. With larger numbers of students than ever before queuing up for examinations of various types, large sums of money are saved by getting rid of the oral examination. This is especially so in a country like Norway, where you are forced to have external examiners on almost every occasion, and where travel costs are substantial because one would normally need to fly between cities.

If it is decided to assess the knowledge of students without any oral examination, one may come to think that a great improvement has been made. More than one problem has now been solved. It is not only a question of saving money and tiresome journeys for hundreds of teachers. The problem of nervousness among students waiting to have some possible weak points laid bare has also disappeared, and with it, the related problem of the examiners, of how to discriminate between eloquence and real knowledge demonstration within various subjects.

Still, the feeling remains, that if students are never asked to talk about the things they have learned, you as a teacher will miss the opportunity of getting some idea of how the things you have taught will be carried over to a third party later on. After all, in daily life knowledge is probably shared among people by conversation more frequently than by written presentations.

By making use of group discussions among candidates as an important part of an examination at university, this point is

taken care of. With eight to ten students in a group the problem of getting time enough to assess all candidates is, of course, greatly reduced. One may certainly doubt that it will be possible for an examiner to be able to assess correctly the knowledge of each member in a group of this size. But in this case also it is a question of training and proper preparation. One should not aim for individual marks, but with a series of carefully planned training sessions behind them, a group of students in my experience may come to give you a pretty clear picture of what has been achieved within the subject. If the students are able to present an informed and well-balanced discussion – with everyone in the group taking part – of some question drawn randomly from a pool of about 20 to 40 questions, you as an examiner may feel that the learning institution has also passed an important examination.

In the same way as the students are introduced to the art of taking notes and writing essays, they ought to be told how to take part in discussions of various kinds. But on top of all this there is a need for students on all levels to learn something else, namely the art of surviving in a situation of crisis. In other fields of life, a person who is being trained for work in some profession or other, is usually told what to do in cases of emergency. This in particular applies where difficult or very demanding tasks are concerned. Also, under such circumstances, an instructor would watch you closely, over a period of time, to ensure that you know what to do if some serious problems appear.

In academic life there is no shortage of critical situations. Sometimes, in the middle of a task involving writing you may feel completely lost, even if you have a near perfect knowledge of the subject you are writing about. Anxiety occurs in situations where you are being assessed, even when your competence in the field in question is greater than that of the person there to assess you. A given teacher might, however, belong to the rather small group of people who have very seldom felt an anxiety of this kind: he or she is partly unqualified as a consultant for a group of students who are facing an important examination.

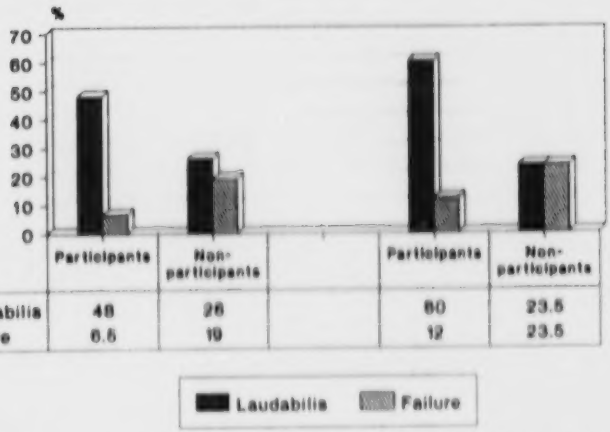
Among the students who have passed the examination at some earlier point in time, on the other hand, there will normally be quite a few who have experienced difficulties of various strengths and still somehow managed to survive. And there is,

perhaps, reason to believe that the majority of those students will belong to the group with average marks, rather than the top ones. At least this was the philosophy behind a teaching experiment which was performed in the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Bergen (Raaheim and Hegdahl 1990). Instead of recruiting 'teaching assistants' among students with excellent marks, which had so often been done in the past, we decided to turn to students who had passed the first year examination with marks just good enough to let them into the extended course in psychology towards the Candidacy Degree. These students were asked to act as tutors for groups of four to six students, who were starting their preparation for the same examination. The tutors were paid a small sum of money for doing the job, and were asked to meet with the students once a week, as an extra offer to a randomly selected sample of first year students.

The tutors had a 'liaison officer', who was a graduate student, to help them keep in touch with the topics of the week-to-week lectures given by the ordinary teachers. Otherwise the tutors were free to organise their weekly sessions with the students in accordance with their own ideas of how to proceed and also with the needs and wishes of the group members.

Reporting back to the leader of this exercise, the tutors would mention a long series of queries which a teacher in normal cases would perhaps not have heard about. Obviously the completely inexperienced 'teaching assistants' of the experiment had been able to tackle a lot of questions in a sensible way, as the vast majority of the students taking part seemed to be very satisfied with the extra guidance provided in this case.

Figure 6.2 shows the outcome of the experiment as far as examination results are concerned. It is seen that in two successive terms, the students who had been offered tutorials by (only somewhat) more experienced fellow students, had among them a significantly larger number of marks qualifying for entrance into the extended course in psychology, and a much lower rate of failure, than the students of the control group, who were treated in the normal way by only being given tuition from ordinary teachers.



	Participants	Non-participants		Participants	Non-participants
Laudabilis	48	26		60	23.5
Failure	6.5	19		12	23.5

Figure 6.2. Percentage of 'laudabilis' marks and rate of failure: 1989 and 1990

As an introduction of an equivalent teaching arrangement to the one described might prove very beneficial and inexpensive for various departments, one would have thought that the example set by the Faculty of Psychology would be followed by departments in other faculties at the University of Bergen, especially since the universities of Norway were given orders – to put it bluntly – from the State Department of Education to get better results, in particular with students at introductory level. However, when you have a system, as is the case in Norway, where the intake to courses at higher levels is based upon the results of the students at lower levels, in such a way that a particular mark obtained by a student earns him or her the *right* to take a particular course, even if only after some time of waiting; then anything leading to a larger number of good marks among newcomers will represent a problem. In the Faculty of Psychology itself, qualified students already had to wait for at least two years before they could continue their studies in psychology. A change in teaching methods leading to results such as those of the experiment reported above, would also lead to the problem of adding about three-and-a-half years to the waiting time. And so a very cheap and effective way of getting better examination

results among students had simply to be considered as just another variable within the context of an experiment in educational psychology.

4. Co-ordination *between learning and teaching efforts, and the evaluation of outcome*

Co-ordination is such a technical term. Yet within higher education the lack of it may be of great importance in the daily life of students. On the one hand, you have the textbooks and the effort of getting a clear picture of the whole of the curriculum. On the other hand, there are series of lectures, where each lecturer seems to be granted the right to talk about whatever he or she chooses, irrespective of its relationship with the material read by the listeners.

There is no need to deny lecturers the right to talk about the things that occupy their minds at a given time, such as the results of their own research. But it ought to be made clear to the audience that they are doing just that. And it must also be ensured that there is, at all times, a variety of teaching services, so as to fill the students' needs for assistance in the learning process.

In today's life in places of higher education, there is the demand to have everyone's job evaluated by someone. And so students are asked to assess the lecturer, usually by answering some questionnaire. But this is normally done without any reference to the total department offers, say, where the teaching programme in a particular term is concerned. A Norwegian university might, for example, be the stage of the following episode:

A professor has decided to present his version of a particular problem, which the students have had the opportunity of reading about in the textbook. Among the 200 students in the lecture hall on a given day, around 50 happen to get a much clearer picture of the problem by listening to what the professor has to say, and so they are delighted and perfectly willing to give the lecturer a top mark on the evaluation sheet. And, quite frankly, as a teacher you may only seldom achieve anything like this: a quarter of the students seeing the light as a result of less than one hour's talking. However, when you are left with the large majority (75%) of students who had come to the lecture with a wish to learn *something other* than what they had already read

about in the textbook, the final verdict is not encouraging. The record shows that only 25 per cent of the students found the professor's lecture to be of interest.

It must be considered the responsibility of a department to present to the students a teaching programme for each term, detailed enough to make the nature of a given series of lectures clear. Criticism directed towards one particular teacher will in some cases mean that the programme as such is being criticised. The department is not only responsible for the content of the teaching programme, but also for deciding how the programme is to be implemented, which includes the choice of teachers for its various parts.

There are, of course, enormous variations in the degree of structure of teaching programmes between different subjects. In medical schools, even in Scandinavia, where the academic freedom to talk about what comes to mind on a given day sometimes is carried too far, a professor has to lecture according to a plan decided upon by some standing committee within the faculty. The students would therefore probably know roughly what to expect on a given occasion. But this does not mean that the problem of co-ordination has been solved. You might still find that a particular teacher does nothing more – or less – than to present the students with his or her version of the story told by the textbook, whereas another lecturer takes it upon him- or herself to enlarge the picture already found in the book.

In setting up a contract between myself as a teacher and the students of the Examen Philosophicum (see above), I succeeded in making it clear what the division of labour would be in this particular case. By simply taking it for granted that the students had read the relevant part of the textbook before a lecture, I was free to concentrate on a discussion of how the knowledge gained from reading the book might be used to throw light on a question of the type the students would probably be faced with on the day of the examination. The students, on their side, were not in a position to complain about my negligence of the content of the textbook. If they had not prepared themselves according to the terms of the contract, they would, of course, gain very little from listening to what I had to say. But there was nothing else for them to do than quickly to put things right by studying the textbook. Since, in this case, almost every student came to the

weekly lecture, I may be right in assuming that (naturally) they had done their bit. If not, there would be no good reason for attending the lectures, other than misplaced politeness.

It had taken me some time to reach the point in my teaching career at university where I was prepared to enter into a dialogue with a group of students, in order to get the clearest possible picture of who they were, learning-wise, and what they were expecting to get out of my teaching. For a number of years I had just been giving my weekly lecture on an announced subject, to students in their first year of psychology, say, without even knowing whether or not this was the first series of lectures they had ever attended or if, perhaps, the majority of the students were in their second semester and, as a consequence, nearer to the challenge of presenting their knowledge at the examination at the end of the first year. When after some years of teaching I felt secure enough to address the students in the lecture hall, to get some information about their background before I started my teaching, I was often very surprised, when, for example, on a given occasion 95 per cent of the students in the hall had never before been to a lecture at university, not to mention one in psychology.

When some 25 years ago the universities of Norway had somewhat recovered from the shock of seeing the number of new students nearly double from one year to the next, a national committee was set up with a mandate to look into the problems of teaching in higher education, and to look for procedures successfully adopted by institutions of higher education in other European countries.

As the Chairman of that committee, I quickly found that I had quite a lot to learn. But so had others, and after some time I was asked to act as a consultant within a variety of settings throughout the country. A typical problem would be that of handling the challenge of having about 300 new students in a department that up until then would have had about 50 to 60. Very often a department would have tried to solve the problem by setting up something like 15 introductory seminars, as against the previous figure of three or four. But this, of course, could not be done without engaging more members of staff in the teaching of new students. The problem often accompanying this arrangement

was that some members of staff seemed to be less suited to do this than those who previously had such a job.

In places of higher education you do not have members of staff who are all naturally born or professionally trained teachers. If in the future universities one-sidedly seek to arrange for this, the creative researcher will perhaps be hard to find among members of staff. But taking it for granted that you do not have 15 or more qualified teachers for introductory seminars, what else can you do?

In many cases I found that a department would have a large enough lecture hall to cater for all the new students in a given term. My very simple advice was then to select the most experienced teacher, or one who was known to be good – which normally tended to be one and the same – to address the whole group of students in weekly introductory lectures, accompanied by weekly 'study groups', where the other available members of staff served as 'tutors', all with their weak and strong spots and personal style. The point is not that I was a clever person to think about a solution such as this, but rather that it was necessary for well-established institutions, for example the Law School at the University of Oslo, to have someone from the outside suggesting what to do.

However, the problem of co-ordination in learning and teaching is not only one of getting rid of mismatches between the two in the course of a tuition programme. It is also a question of co-ordinating the combined study efforts with the demands of assessment, when, perhaps, in some great lecture hall, the students are asked to demonstrate their knowledge of a subject by answering examination questions. In what follows I shall be reporting the results of some training programmes in which extensive attempts were made systematically to prepare the students for the task of the examination, for example by making use of test-examinations during the course of the term.

In Figure 6.3 is given the percentage of examination results reaching 'laudabilis', which in the Norwegian system would mean a rather good mark and one that would normally earn you the right to enter into study programmes on higher levels within the subject in question. The results stem from three test-examinations held during the term and the final, ordinary examination at the end.

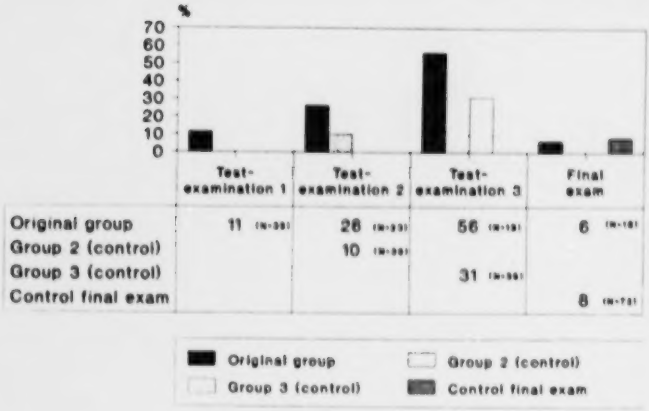


Figure 6.3. Percentage of 'laudabilis' marks: test-examinations and final examination

In each group of this teaching experiment, there were initially 50 students. The members of Group I were given the opportunity of sitting for three test-examinations during the term. The members of Group II were only given the chance of one test-examination (No. 2 in the series) and so were the members of Group III, who took part in the third test-examination only. As will be seen, a number of students failed to show up on the day, as is the case with normal examinations. Of the 50 students in Group I, who were offered all three test-examinations, 36 showed up the first time, the percentage in Groups II and III being similar. For the second test, only 23 students arrived, a figure falling to 18 for the third test.

It has been demonstrated to be a negative side-effect of test-examinations, that students who happen to get a low mark to begin with, more often than students who are successful, tend to avoid sitting for another test. (For a discussion of possible remedies for this, see Raaheim *et al.* 1991.) However, what is our concern in the present connection, is the increase in good marks from one test to the next. The percentage of 'laudabilis' was originally 11 in Group I. This is a 'normal' result as far as early examinations at university in Norway are concerned. The fig-

ures for the official examination at the end of the term corroborate this. The strange part is, however, that the students of Group I seem to become better and better from one test-examination to the next, whereas by the end they are back to a disappointing 6% of laudabilis at the ordinary exam.

The explanation I want to offer is the following:

At each test-examination as the term went along, the experimenter confronted the students with questions based upon what had been lectured about during the past few weeks. Naturally, only what had been taught so far was open for examination. And since there were three successive test-examinations before the fourth and official test, the students were safe in assuming that a preparation for the examination could be based upon knowledge recently gained. Seeing this to be so at the day of the test-examination, the students would feel even more confident the next time that no unpleasant surprise would appear.

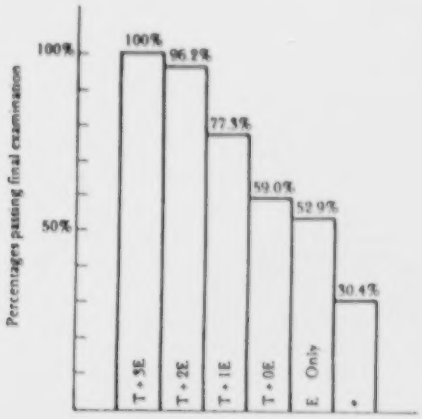
Not so, of course, at the final examination. The questions put here were beyond the influence of the experimenter; rather, as is normally the case, some member of the examination committee takes it upon him- or herself to come up with a brand new type of question or a new twist to an old one. The nervousness of the students, when the examination is the final one as far as the course is concerned, will only add to the awkwardness many students show at exams.

While the exercise with test-examinations took place within the setting of the teaching of psychology as part of the Examen Philosophicum in the late 1970s, some five years later another experiment was set up. With a group of a couple of hundred students preparing for the first year examination in psychology, a series of test-examinations was combined with students working in study groups with a limited number of participants and under the leadership of a somewhat more experienced student (see p.120, where a similar arrangement is described).

Care was taken also to prepare the students for unexpected questions at the final examination. So, one of the three text-examinations this time included questions unrelated to what had been taught during the last weeks of the course. The students had been instructed to read the questions calmly and to spend some time reflecting upon them and making notes before they started to write their answers.

Figure 6.4 shows the relationship between the degree of participation of the students in the teaching programme and their success as far as passing the examination was concerned. In this case a very close correspondence is found between participation in tuition activities and final examination results. Among the students who chose *not* to take part in tutorials and test-examinations, only about 30 per cent passed the examination. This is in contrast to the students of the two groups with total (or almost total) participation, where nearly everyone succeeded in passing the examination. As for the number of marks good enough to reach the level of laudabilis, it was found that among the students who did *not* take part in the tuition activities referred to, only 4 per cent had such a mark, as against 62 per cent in the group with full participation.

The objection may be raised that if the co-ordination between the teaching situation and that of the assessment of the students' academic skills is brought too far, one runs the risk of not being



T = took part in tutorials.
E = took part in test-examinations.
* Did not take part in either tutorials or test-examinations.

Figure 6.4. Effects of participation in tutorials and test-examinations

in a position to make possible a distinction between the very talented students and those who 'merely' are able to recall what they have recently been told. To make use of an examination situation where the questions come as a total surprise, therefore, might be a better way to discover who are the most skilful or able students. Admittedly, the ability to keep calm and to cope in a situation of crisis is a valuable one. But is this what the academic life is all about? Is the handling of the examination situation a valid measure of high ability?

I can only throw a tiny beam of light upon this question. As part of a larger enterprise a group of psychology students were given the opportunity to take part in a number of test-examinations. In two of the cases the general topic to be dealt with in the essay was announced a week before the day of essay writing and the students were encouraged to spend time going through the literature, looking through notes taken at lectures and discussing among themselves the central issues involved. A third test-examination was arranged in a similar way as the official examination. In this case the students had no idea about the questions to be dealt with before the actual day of writing the essay. The marks received by the students at the final, ordinary examination, were also eventually available and included in the data from the experiment.

The students had all been tested earlier with two tests of 'general intellectual ability'. One was a sentence completion test, the other a test of spatial configurations.

The examination results were not expected to be closely related to the test scores of the students, but it was considered to be of interest to see if the introduction of some familiarity with the topics to be dealt with, in the way described above, would make any difference as far as the relationship between test scores and marks was concerned.

The results showed that neither the marks at the official examination, nor the results at the test-examination with the unexpected questions, bore any relationship to the test scores. With the two test-examinations where the students were familiar with the general topic beforehand, so as to be able to prepare for the exam in a sensible way, on the other hand, a positive correlation between test scores and examination results was, in fact, found to exist. This was most convincingly demonstrated

in the group of male students, where the correlations between scores on the verbal test and examination results turned out to be +0.57 and +0.56, for the two test-examinations in question (Raaheim and Brun 1985).

It goes perhaps almost without saying that the passing of an examination ought always to be based upon the knowledge gained through the teaching and learning programme which has preceded the examination. Moreover, if a teacher wants to encourage the students before the battle of the examination, by, among other things, telling them that their country expects every man to do his duty, he or she has to make sure that everyone knows what their duty is and how to perform it. And, surely, without the co-ordination of efforts no big battle has ever been won.

Concluding remarks and some practical implications

I have been fortunate enough to have been given the opportunity to perform numerous teaching experiments in a university setting. Almost without exception, whenever there was any discussion as to what would happen if changes were made to teaching arrangements, there was the possibility of actually trying these out. However, in the various cases where some modest, and perhaps sometimes not so modest, success was obtained, very seldom were the successful changes adopted. Not in my own department, and not elsewhere.

With the successful introduction of fellow students as consultants for students preparing for the first year examination in psychology (see above), there was seemingly good reason to forget all about the results, at least as far as the Faculty of Psychology was concerned. Nevertheless, in this particular case, the approach was followed up at other universities and within other subjects. I shall report upon these exercises here, to illustrate how difficult it may be to duplicate a training programme in higher education without a very intimate knowledge of the details of the procedure.

The first case is taken from a department of science, where it had been found that the students of chemistry did very poorly in an introductory course. It was decided, therefore, to try out the arrangement with students acting as consultants. As was the

case in the original set-up, students who had passed the examination some time before had weekly sessions with study groups of four to six students now preparing for the examination. The participation in the study groups this time was made optional. It was reported that about half of the total number of students who had registered for the examination actually took part.

When the results of the examination became available, it appeared that the rate of failure was somewhat *higher* among students who had taken part in the experiment, than among students who had chosen not to take part. But then again, the overall rate of failure at the examination had gone down from about 34 per cent (the year before) to about 16 per cent (Skanke and Olson 1992).

What seems to me to be a very simple explanation of this seemingly strange finding, was the fact that participation in study groups had been introduced as a special offer to students who felt insecure and in need of help to understand the problems of the curriculum. It is very likely that the participants would have done worse had they not taken up the offer.

The next case is from the Faculty of Social Science at another university. Here the examination results of an introductory course in the methods of social science showed that some improvement in teaching methods might be needed. It was decided to give the students the extra offer of taking part in study groups, organised in the way it had been done in the psychology department, and later – as just described – in chemistry. As far as I know, care was taken this time *not* to present the offer as something needed for insecure students only. Rather, attempts were made to give the impression that this was a good thing for everyone.

The rate of failure at the subsequent examination this time was about the same as had been the case the year before. Again you had, however, to look around a bit to spot the effect of the new teaching arrangement. It turned out that this time there had been a rumour among the students that everyone who took part in the extra teaching offer would have the guarantee of a good mark. The result of this rumour apparently was that a number of students were over-confident that they would have no problem in passing the examination. What rather strongly suggested this to be the case, was the fact that the percentage of students

withdrawing from the examination after having registered (a number of weeks earlier) this time went down to zero, as against a normal percentage of about 20. So, this time also, it could be argued that the introduction of the new offer had helped to bring about an improvement in the examination results (Tungodden 1995).

It takes some skill – sometimes – to discover that a new teaching arrangement is somewhat better than the one that was there before. And whenever something is a little complicated, even people in the academic world often tend to shrug their shoulders, rather than bother to look deeper into a somewhat complex situation.

From what has been presented above one may safely conclude that I have been trying to get a particular message across: that the question of how many students a given institution of higher education might cater for, within some subject or other, is a question of (governmental) decision and the provision of resources, rather than a question of a clear-cut restriction as far as human abilities are concerned. And when a room is large enough, and the technical arrangements are such that everyone can see and hear the lecturer, one may let 800 in, instead of half the number, if there is reason to believe that all 800 stand the same chance of succeeding. This is, on the one hand, if there is the need for the students to meet weekly with the commanding officer. On the other hand, modern technology ought to solve a lot of problems, as far as new teaching techniques are concerned. Personally, I cannot see why one should not consider it possible to teach, for example, twice as many students as before, without adding to the number of members of staff. It takes some creative thinking, but one cannot but hope that this is still to be found within institutions of higher education.

Surely students need to see living persons as tutors and not only computer programs. But then again, the large number of students today means that there are also large numbers of older students to turn to. In Norway the extended course towards the Candidacy of Psychology takes five years at least. Then, if a student in the last semester, the tenth one, met weekly with *two* students who were half a year behind him or her in the race, and those two each saw two students having a whole year left, and so on, half a thousand students in their first semester would be

catered for in this way. And when you don't have one, but about 20 or 30 students in their final term each year, it is clear that you need only a fraction of the capacity of this system to give every student access to a consultant. Moreover, that consultant for her or – more seldom – his part would also profit learning-wise by having to explain things to somewhat less experienced fellow students.

However successful this might be, there is, I would think, more than one reason why one should consider some restriction on the number of students admitted to universities and other learning institutions. And once you introduce the possibility of choosing among applicants, you start looking for a procedure that might help you to pick the most suitable ones. Is it possible to require the students to pass some test, for the assessment of their general fitness for intellectual work or of some special qualities needed for a given subject of study?

In Great Britain a serious attempt was made nearly 30 years ago, by the National Foundation for Educational Research in England, to construct a test of Academic Aptitude – as it was called. In a mammoth national study, 9395 university entrants out of a complete 1968 cohort of 27,315 sixth formers in 619 schools in England and Wales were surveyed. The test came in two versions, one for science and one for the humanities.

The results were a complete fiasco as far as predictions of the final degree results were concerned. In the official report it was concluded that: 'The data provide no valid base for the introduction of a system of threshold criteria for university selection' (Choppin *et al.* 1973).

The result of earlier learning efforts, for example in the form of marks from school examinations, is still the better indicator of future learning results. But the prediction is dependent upon the similarities between subjects. If, at university, a student enters into a field which he or she never met with in school, the learning results may be markedly different from what the student has obtained before.

Apart from earlier school records, what else have you got if you are to select among applicants those who will be given a chance to enter into an academic career? Probably very little, so why not simply invite everyone to have a go?

I must hasten to add, to begin with, that 'everyone' most certainly will not accept the invitation. Also one needs to discuss what to do if half the number of those who choose to come have second thoughts – and leave – after some time (see later). In Norway there is the system whereby entrance examinations in the form of Examen Philosophicum are arranged locally. The problem of second thoughts might here be left to bodies outside the universities themselves.

Some 20 years ago, an important member (up until the time of his proposal) of the Labour Party in Norway put forward the suggestion that everyone who had a working record of six years should be entitled to enter university, if only to get a test of their own abilities. The suggestion was not well received, to put it mildly, and the politician was told, if not in so many words, to shut up and forever keep his peace. But what of it, had the man's proposal been given a try?

Only as an informal experiment can such a question be looked into, of course. But such an experiment I got a chance of setting up myself, with the assistance of a young lecturer who happened to be my son, and who for that very reason, perhaps, was willing to go along with the experiment.

The study was arranged as follows:

Among a number of people who were anxious to see what university studies were about, but who were lacking (by far) the qualifications needed to be allowed, in a normal way, to enter a course at university, a group of about 15 subjects was recruited for the experiment. The question was whether or not these people would in fact be able to pick up the necessary 'study skills' during a one term course in psychology.

To be able to assess the 'academic skills' of the subjects, initially and as the course proceeded, the experimenter, who was also the lecturer, asked the subjects to hand in essays at regular intervals during the term. After a normal lecture a session of discussion was held each week. Here the lecturer tried to explain to the subjects how such questions as those met with during the lecture were normally dealt with in an academic discussion, and how one ought to go about writing an essay about the topic. Each week, then, the students would get a topic to write about at home. They were instructed to try to follow carefully the rules which had been explained to them.

During the first few weeks about half of the students seemingly had come to the conclusion that university studies were not, after all, for them. The remaining subjects, upon inspection, did not turn out to be in any way 'superior' as far as formal education was concerned. Rather it seemed to be a question of motivation, since in fact rather strong demands were placed upon the subjects each week. So much of what was going on was totally outside their previous experience. No diploma or any other formal qualification would be a result of the course, and with the subjects having ordinary jobs during the day and the lectures taking place after working hours, it is likely that the subjects who withdrew simply came to the conclusion that they could spend their spare time more profitably and in a less demanding way by doing something else.

The first few essays handed in by the remaining subjects left the experimenters with serious doubts as to the possible success of the lay students. There seemed to be such a lot of things about which the subjects were totally ignorant. They did not seem to understand how one could possibly be interested in arguing about subtle differences of opinion among scientists living in the last century; they did not see why or how one ought to make one's own contribution to a discussion about complex problems; and they seemed also to be in difficulty when trying to choose proper terms in which to express themselves, to mention some of the most important problems faced by the subjects.

Towards the middle of the term a few more subjects had to leave the group, this as a result of obligations at work. To the remaining half-a-dozen subjects the experimenters were able to give even more personal advice than had been done before, and also more detailed comments on their essays each week.

Gradually, but very slowly at first, the essays improved, and eventually the subjects seemed to have discovered the trick. Since the rules had been specified to them in a way rarely done at university, and perhaps also since they came from the outside, so to speak, without having already more or less automatically adopted a way of expressing themselves in essay writing, the subjects of this study seemed to be more conscious about every step to be taken. Towards the end of the term a few of the essays became remarkably good, reminding the lecturer of essays of a type normally only produced by students after a full three term

course. A final test of the achievements of the subjects was made, then, by letting them take part in the ordinary examination at the end of the term, with their essays smuggled in between those of the ordinary students, without the examiners knowing anything about the experiment.

The experiment was a success in so far as all the remaining students passed the examination. Two of them even had marks well above the average for the group of 'normal', full-time students. Nothing very sensational, perhaps, came out of the experiment, other than a clear indication that even with people who, because of a lack of formal schooling, are totally unfamiliar with the rules of academic discourse, a specially arranged course may be all that is needed to teach them the necessary skills.

But this is only one part of the lesson to be learned from the study. Another part is the suggestion that if you let 'everyone' into university, you must not take it for granted that everyone would stay there. Most people are able to see for themselves that a particular line of work is not for them. And so, if entering into university life were no longer seen as a privilege, the number of people actually wanting to take up university studies might perhaps go down.

PART IV

Ends and Means in Higher Education

Chapter 7

Ends and Means in Higher Education

John Radford

Views of interested parties

In political discussion the word 'stakeholders' has been much in vogue, perhaps with no very clear definition of just what a stake is, or how one holds it in relation to society. Previously it had been used in respect of education to mean those with some legitimate interest in what is done. This would include, for higher education, the general public, employers, the professions, political parties, government and ministries (by no means always the same thing), funding agencies, academic staff, senior management and students. It is perhaps possible to simplify these to four main groups: higher education staff, students and their families, employers (including professions and their specialised training courses), and society as a whole (which, directly or indirectly, must foot the bill). In practice, the last is generally taken to be the same as the government of the day, which is assumed to represent public opinion more or less. Actually, as has been well documented, official policy may simply reflect political calculation and civil service in-fighting, in a way hardly distinguishable from an episode of the TV comedy *Yes, Minister*.

However, it is at least clear that all these main groups want to get something from higher education, and have a case for doing so. Although seldom the most powerful group, academics have probably been the most vocal. Many of the theorists of higher education have naturally been employed in it. Libraries are full of their views, and of the pronouncements of vice chancellors

and the like, often in the form of inaugural or valedictory addresses expressing their hopes and fears for the university system. It has become almost obligatory for a university to produce a 'mission statement' or list of 'goals' or 'aims', which is meant to describe in general terms the sort of thing they hope to achieve. Allen (1988) collected some 2000 goal statements and classified them into two broad groups: the abilities and aptitudes of individual students – cognitive learning, emotional and moral development, and practical competence; and the needs of society – knowledge, the arts, the discovery and development of new talent, and 'the university experience'. Underlying these, Allen described six issues, two each concerning courses, research and academic staff. Should courses be liberal or vocational? Should they be broad-based or specialised? Should research be an essential function of the university, or not? Should it be pure or applied? Should teachers adopt an expository or didactic style? Should they take an active or a passive role? In practice these are (at least in the UK) often more a matter of individual emphasis than of dichotomies. At least at the beginning, polytechnics were not supposed to engage in research, but they always did so to the extent that they were able. The nature of their courses was the result of an interaction between market forces, and the capabilities and preferences of staff. Many teachers would consider that they adopt different styles to suit different teaching situations. And many disciplines (psychology for one) would see no sharp distinction between pure and applied research. Psychologists (the present writer very much among them) have also often argued that their discipline is, or should be, both liberal and vocational, and they are not alone in this. Indeed, as has been suggested above, the supposed dichotomy between the two is a legacy from one small part of the history of higher education and ought now to be superseded.

There have been some attempts to investigate what academics think they are up to, and where they stand on such issues. Often these seem to end up focusing on problems, as has doubtless been the case since John of Salisbury. Caplow and McGee (1958), for example, interviewed academics in ten major universities in the USA. Their respondents were worried about the uneasy relationship of teaching and research, in particular that they tended to be judged on their research performance, yet research

was not their main employment, but 'a kind of part-time voluntary job' (Halsey 1992) which they created for themselves. They were also concerned about job insecurity; about inequitable treatment, in particular on the basis of sex, colour, religion or alma mater; about the role of authority within the university; and about inadequacy of information. Halsey and Trow (1971), in their classic study of the British academic profession, described a relatively prosperous and prestigious group, enjoying a secure lifestyle based around mainly academic interests (and an income around twice the national average). They distinguished two main dichotomous dimensions of academic attitudes: first a conception of the primary academic role as concerned either with research and the creation of new knowledge, or with teaching, that is, the transmission of knowledge and the shaping of character; and second a conception of the university as either élitist or expansionist. Overall, it was probably true to say that the predominant view was in each case the first half of the dichotomy. Had they studied the emerging polytechnics, they might well have found the opposite. Halsey and Trow were in fact sampling an era that was all but over, roughly corresponding to the hey-day of the University Grants Committee (UGC), the half century from about 1920. They doubted whether many of the traditional values and methods of British universities could survive the Robbins expansion, and Halsey (1992), reviewing the situation two decades later, concluded this was being borne out; his book is titled *The Decline of Donnish Dominion*. Smyth (1995) gives an even more dramatic picture, not just in the UK but in other countries such as the USA, Australia and Canada. Everywhere, it seems, academics are being reduced to 'workers in the knowledge factories', with less control over the institution in which they are employed, over the organisation of what they do, and over what they teach and research. This appears to result from a combination and interaction of, on the one hand, deliberate policies both internal and external to the universities and, on the other, demographic and economic factors over which none of the policy-makers has very much control. Principally, there is a general tendency towards control as against autonomy, and an increasing demand for higher education from students and from industry, combined with a relatively diminishing resource base. None of these is

new, as we have noted. University autonomy has continually been under pressure, from first the ecclesiastical and then the civil powers. Increasing numbers of students have (usually) been pressing to enter what has been seen as the gateway to advancement. And the costs have always been rising. There has seldom been enough money, except for a few privileged enclaves. But in the most recent decades all these factors have increased dramatically – in Britain, consequent largely on economic decline, combined with the extremely centralist policies of Margaret Thatcher's administration, well documented by Simon Jenkins in 1995. Again history seems to repeat itself – the Tudors did the same, and the universities languished for a couple of centuries.

The reaction of academics to these developments seems to be mixed. Anecdote suggests elements of both nostalgia and confusion. British academic staff today are in general people in middle life or older (due to length of training and recent restrictions on recruitment), who (presumably) enjoyed university life as students in rather more spacious days, and thought they would like to earn their living in it, pursuing a discipline that intrigued them and interacting with students. They are finding, so to speak, the rug pulled from under them. Apart from anecdote, there have been a few small recent studies of academic views. None of these finds any difference between men and women as to the nature of the academic role, although the latter are still under-represented in the more senior posts. Two studies by myself and Leonard Holdstock have asked directly about the functions of universities, what students can gain from them and so on. In one case (unpublished) respondents were psychologists in four former polytechnic departments, in the other (Radford and Holdstock 1996) a sample of the readers of *New Academic*, a journal concerned with teaching and learning in higher education. The average age in both cases was just over 45. The questions asked, and the responses, are sufficiently similar to take the results as a whole, with some variations; samples were small, but the responses were very homogeneous and statistically meaningful. Given a choice of functions drawn from the extensive literature, not surprisingly 'teaching students', 'learning and scholarship' and 'research and new knowledge' came at the top, more or less together. Factor analysis

shows these to be associated, together with 'challenging accepted views', though this is considered much less important. A second factor includes 'preparing students for a career' and 'meeting the needs of employers', the first being much more important than the second. A third factor is considered to be of little or no importance; it contains items concerned with promoting religious, moral or general cultural values. Ranked right at the bottom on its own is 'implementing government policy'. These results contrast with the description of Halsey and Trow: there is no dichotomy between research and teaching, but the latter is concerned with imparting knowledge, not developing character. When it comes to what students might gain from their higher education, the most important single item is 'ability to think clearly', with which are associated subject knowledge and discipline methodology. Another group, second in importance, is concerned with personal development: learning to learn, communication skills, learning to work with others, personal maturity, wider perspectives and leadership qualities; in that order of importance. A third group is related to employment: practical, work-related skills, a useful qualification and social skills, the first two being rated considerably more highly than the last. It has so far proved to be impossible to get an Oxbridge sample, which might possibly rate leadership more highly. In the USA, again, intellectual skills are the most highly regarded of possible outcomes of higher education. A survey of the opinions of almost 30,000 faculty members in 1992–3 (Dey *et al.* 1993) found that 'ability to think clearly' was rated either 'essential' or 'very important' all but universally (99%), followed by 'desire and ability to undertake self-directed learning' (92%). At around 65 to 55 per cent come, in order: preparing students for employment after college, enhancing students' self-understanding, helping students develop personal understanding, helping students develop personal values, developing moral character, and preparing students for graduate or advanced education. Less than one-third endorsed knowledge of the classic works of Western civilisation, and only one in five, preparing students for family living. (There are some variations within this large sample according to type of institution.)

The British respondents thought that what was most important in developing and improving the work of university teach-

ers was better library resources. In-service training for teachers was also highly rated, followed by manpower assistance of various kinds – in research, administration and so on. There was little desire, however, for teaching or tutorial assistants – one of the mainstays of the American system. Nor did the idea of a formal accreditation system for university teachers get much support. In a write-in item, the psychologists listed difficulties in their work of the kind frequently reported: increase in workload resulting from much higher student–staff ratios, resulting in loss of personal contact and individual or small group teaching; falling standards of student intake and of degrees; lack of funding for adequate salaries and general resources; and interference from ideologically motivated management. The *New Academic* readers, on the other hand, thought the current intake of 30 per cent about right. They were also asked how practical, and how desirable, they considered various ways of dealing with this increased demand to be. The most desirable approach was increased public funding, but this was considered only moderately practical. New teaching methods, on the other hand, were thought both very desirable and very practical. There was also support on both counts for an increase in part-time courses; 'more students living at home', however, was thought highly practical but less desirable. Shorter degree courses, and development of private universities (another feature of the USA as well as other countries) were considered both undesirable and impractical.

What students themselves want from their higher education has been the subject of several investigations, some of them extensive. Perhaps the first point is overall satisfaction. This seems a bit like the optimist and the pessimist – the glass is half full or half empty. Thus Brennan and McGeevor (1988), in a study of 4000 CNAA graduates of 1982, found that 67.8% thought their studies had made a useful or essential contribution to their quality of work; whereas Johnston (1991), with a sample of 18,575 1980 graduates, followed up six years later, found more than 20% dissatisfied with the course they had followed, to the extent that they would either choose a different course or not enter higher education at all. The dissatisfied fell into two overlapping groups: those who felt their qualifications had not helped in securing either or both of an interesting job and a good

income; and those who felt they had not been helped to become well-educated persons. Both studies found differences between students graduating in different subjects. Another large study indicating a high rate of satisfaction is by Boys and Kirkland (1988). Two factors that may contribute to such a finding are that completing a fairly demanding course and attaining graduate status are satisfying in themselves, and that graduate career prospects actually are superior to those of non-graduates, on average. These studies were undertaken before the doubling of student intake had come into effect, and were all done in the UK.

While students are in a sense perennial, and probably recognisably the same whether in Imperial China, classical Athens, mediaeval Bologna or the present day, student culture does seem to vary to some extent between times and places. The political activism of the 1960s seems far removed from the 1990s. However, it is plausible to argue that what caught the headlines then was the work of a minority – notoriously, when student action took place, the majority largely ignored it. Hoge, Hoge and Wittenberg (1987) conducted five identical surveys (1952, 1968, 1974, 1979, 1984) to measure trends in values among males at two universities in the USA. They found a U-shaped pattern, in other words over this period values which were high in the 1950s were returning in the 1980s. In general this constituted a move from 'conservative' to 'liberal' and back again, in respect of such issues as traditional religion, career choice, faith in government and the military, advocacy of social constraint on deviant groups, attitudes to free enterprise, government and economics, sexual morality, marihuana use, and personal freedom and social obligations. There is probably a tendency for attitudes in the UK to follow on those in the USA about a decade behind, so that one might expect the 1990s to be more 'conservative'; and to affect, to some extent, what students want from their education. (At the moment of writing, students at leading universities in the UK are reported to be strongly favouring the Labour over the Conservative Party; but the precise relationship between the political parties and 'liberal' or 'conservative' attitudes and policies is becoming quite obscure.) Several extensive studies were carried out in the 1980s into reasons for entering university and the perceived benefits of having been there, particularly in relation to employment. Boys (1984), based on a

sample of over 3500 undergraduates, found 'interest in subject' to be the main reason for entering university – somewhat more so for women than for men. However, 'interest' almost certainly conceals a clutch of factors which need to be unpacked. Other reasons for entering university included the wish to be better educated, to learn more about the subject, having nothing better to do after school, and not wanting to disappoint parents or teachers. When asked about factors important in long-term career prospects, Boys' respondents emphasised using the skills and knowledge acquired on their course, and doing creative and original work, followed by helping others. Brennan and McGeevor (1988), taking rather a different line, asked graduates what they felt they had gained from their education. Results varied from subject to subject, for example 'political consciousness' was far more salient for such subjects as economics and sociology than for, say, mathematics; 'understanding others' was particularly high for psychology and English literature; and 'numeracy' for mathematics. Overall, however, benefits in a fairly regularly descending order were perceived as: critical thinking; independence; ability to organise one's own work; written communication; applying knowledge and skills; confidence; understanding others; logical thought; speaking ability; co-operation; responsibility; numeracy; political consciousness; and leadership. Critical thinking also stood out when respondents were asked whether they thought that graduates possessed any of a series of qualities to a greater extent than did non-graduates – in fact it was the only one to get a positive rating on this criterion. It should be remembered that these were all CNAA graduates, and not necessarily typical of the whole population.

There is some evidence, from more recent but much smaller studies by myself and Leonard Holdstock, that students are even more practically oriented than before. Students from one older civic, one ex-polytechnic and one Irish university were fairly consistent in putting at or near the top of their agenda items concerned with: passing examinations, academic qualifications, achieving the best one is capable of, opportunity to enter preferred career, knowledge of chosen subject, ability to organise one's own life, and learning to apply knowledge. Female students added: developing self-confidence and understanding

other people. On the other hand, at the bottom of most lists are items about: hearing inspiring teachers, being part of a scientific/scholarly community, meeting or seeing distinguished people, being part of a prestigious institution, and gaining a respite prior to seeking employment. These were from a list of 60 items drawn from the extensive literature and from discussions with students (Radford and Holdstock 1994). It is possible that in future years distance may lend enchantment, and former students come to value the less tangible benefits more highly; but it seems that at the moment of choice they look more to the main chance. We have followed this up with some investigations of the attitudes of other students at GCE A-level stage, i.e. prospective university students, and the parents of students actually at university, using short lists of the main possible gains, but also including items on the proper functions of universities (Radford and Holdstock 1997). All the results are pretty consistent. Today's students are primarily concerned with the practical issues of obtaining a qualification and moving on in a career. But in doing this they want to study something they think they will enjoy and be good at. To a lesser extent, but still importantly, they are concerned with their own personal development in a more general sense; while, for some, particular intellectual skills or knowledge are important in relation to their preferred subject, such as 'understanding how society works' for politics, 'computing skills' (rather obviously) for computing science, and so on. This is clearly quite consistent with the other side of the coin, dissatisfaction, found by Johnston. They are much less concerned with the sort of general education described by the Abbot of Downside, and still less with cultural, moral or religious issues. Without doubt, such issues are of great importance to many individual students, but they are not thought to be intrinsic to university education. Parents and students agree that the primary and equally important functions of universities are research and teaching. The single point on which there is greatest unanimity, however, is that it is better for students to go away from home to study.

The relationship between higher education, indeed education generally, and employers has been chequered. 'Employers' can be considered here as those who take on the output of education, as workers or trainees in the public or private sectors. In the

nineteenth century it was largely assumed that the products of Oxford and Cambridge (and the closely related public schools) would fill management roles in most walks of life. Near the end of the twentieth century, this is still true to an extent in some areas: 36 of the 42 Anglican bishops and archbishops (1994); 18 of the 23 Cabinet members, though not the Prime Minister (1996); 40 of the *Sunday Times* 'City Top 100' (1993). However, a survey of 14,110 directors and senior managers of 2300 UK quoted companies found only 12.6 per cent to have a university degree (Margaret Coles, *The Sunday Times*, 14 January 1996). On the other hand, a report commissioned by the National Advisory Committee for Education and Training Targets found the proportion of the workforce qualified to degree level or equivalent to be 23.4 per cent – below only the USA (30%) and Japan (28.1%) in world terms. The fact that managers apparently are half as likely to be graduates as are their employees might be due to the inappropriateness of university training or to the fact that managers will tend to be of an older generation, when university entrance was much smaller. It is not inconsistent with the higher rating given by students to qualifications rather than social or leadership skills. A desire for more professional, and even technical, expertise was one of the factors behind the creation of the civic universities and later the polytechnics. A mismatch between what higher education produces and what industry needs has been argued for well over 100 years, for example by the Royal Commission on the 'Great Depression' of the 1880s. The Robbins Committee in 1963 gave 'preparing people for work' as one of the four aims of higher education. Currently, the next great UK enquiry into higher education is underway, chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, who is quoted as attaching great importance to vocational aspects (*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 8 March 1996).

However, it has often been pointed out that employers are not in fact very clear as to what they actually want in their graduate intake. The remark of Roizen and Jepson (1985), that, 'employers do not speak with a single voice, nor a small number of aggregated voices' is still true, as is the observation of Cannon (1986) that what employers say they want is often inconsistent with what they do, that is, whom they select. Selection methods themselves are by no means always very sound. When jobs are scarce they may be biased simply by the need to cut down the

numbers. (A graduate of mine some years ago, shortlisted for a vacancy, was actually told: 'You shouldn't be here, you're from a polytechnic'. It wasn't so much prejudice as a way of easing the task – the university graduates would include plenty of good candidates.) Broadly, what employers say they want is either technical expertise, which needs to be combined with the ability to learn as new developments accelerate, or some version of 'transferable skills', sometimes more of the nature of personality traits: such things as communication, ability to work with people/in groups, adaptability, self-reliance, diligence, proactivity and general 'attitude to work' (e.g. Industry in Education report discussed in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2 February 1996). Lindsay Nicolle reported in The Times, 23 October 1996, that, 'the latest research among more than 700 of the UK's top executives' showed ability to work in a team to be the most highly regarded skill, even for technical specialists in information technology. Gordon (1983) reported that employers value arts graduates for critical skills and originality; pure scientists for relevant knowledge, numeracy, drive and ambition; and social scientists for communication skills, critical skill, the ability to absorb information and ambition. It is tempting to guess that what many employers actually look for, covertly or overtly, is candidates like themselves.

All these groups – academics, students and their families, and employers – are, of course, components of 'the general public'. Whether that amorphous body has any collective opinions about higher education has, as far as I know, hardly been investigated systematically. Margaret Thatcher's remark that there is no such thing as society has become notorious. The meaning was, of course, that 'society' cannot make decisions or take action; only individuals can do so. In a representative democracy it has to be assumed that the elected government speaks for people as a whole. For the last three decades the general shape of university education in the UK has followed the 1963 Robbins Report, accepted by the government of the day. Essentially this extended the existing model to a wider intake by affirming certain values and assumptions, as Trow (e.g. 1989) and others have pointed out. In particular, these include the monopoly by state-supported institutions of study leading to a degree (with one exception, Buckingham); the commitment to high and common academic standards for the honours degree; a degree

earned through full-time study over three years; and the costs of student maintenance and instruction being borne (mainly) by the state. The subsequent introduction and then dismantling of the binary system, together with increasing economic problems, led to all these, except, so far, the first, being first questioned and then effectively abandoned. The general rubric for the purposes of higher education was stated in a White Paper of 1987 as being to: serve the economy more effectively; pursue basic scientific research, and scholarship in the arts and humanities; and have closer links with industry, commerce and private enterprise. The broad thrust of this is clearly towards national rather than individual, and economic rather than any other, functions. To it must be added the increasingly pressing necessity to do it all more cheaply, while at the same time meeting the basic need of all political parties that hope to form government, for votes. Expansion of intake must be at least partly motivated by the wish of more people for entry to better paid, more prestigious, professional/management employment: in essence, what is seen in higher education throughout its history. In 1996, the problem of how all these conflicting needs are to be reconciled was referred to a committee of enquiry. How, if at all, it will find a way to balance quality and quantity remains to be seen.

The higher education agenda

It is obvious that such a balance cannot be hoped for unless there is some agreement as to what 'quality' and 'quantity' mean. Currently, as has been pointed out, quantity means roughly the 'upper' 30 per cent, defined mainly, if inaccurately, by A-levels Quality is more problematic. It is not just a question of the measures or indices of quality, as discussed earlier, but of educational values, what education ought to be about: perhaps at its most basic, what sort of product higher education ought to turn out. Most of the expressed desires for higher education by interested parties are currently fairly practical, and the simplest assessment of quality is whether students get the qualifications they desire. Theorists of education have often been more ambitious. Fincher (1993) distinguishes four recurrent themes in a number of writers from Newman onwards: teaching, research, learning and service to the wider community. These have all

been advocated alone and in various combinations or sometimes as incompatible alternatives. As Allen (1988) found, institutions adopt a wide range of official goals, though it may be doubted how wholehearted the commitment to these always is.

One major dichotomy that runs through much theorising is that between the needs or wishes of the individual and those of society or the state. This goes back to the earliest formal systems of which we have record: those of Lao-tse and Confucius in China, and Plato and the sophists in Greece. In China the Confucian ideals of loyalty to the Emperor and adherence to orthodox morality became dominant, and have remained so, broadly speaking, through repeated political revolutions. The Greek contrast of ideals is between a state served by its members, and a society made up of free, equal and effective citizens: simplistically, Sparta or Athens. Much the same dichotomy was noted by Allen in his survey of modern goal statements. Some have argued that the distinction is unnecessary, as the education of the individual, properly understood, must also be of benefit to society. This seems simplistic and out of touch with the reality of competing systems. Totalitarian systems take virtually the opposite line, namely that the good of the individual consists of serving society or state or Church. There are real decisions to be taken here, though they are not often formulated. As we have seen, currently there is ever-increasing pressure for higher education to serve the purposes of central government, which however finds it harder to foot the bill, the mechanism that has given it so much power. And this appears to be directly the opposite of the views of practitioners and consumers of higher education.

Theorists, at least in a broadly 'Western' tradition, usually emphasise the more personal, intangible aspects of higher education. For example, Jaspers (1960) states: 'Instruction and research must aim for more than the transmission of bare facts and skills. They must aim for the formation of the whole man, for education in the broadest sense of the term'. But of course what this is, is itself perennially disputed. The influential view of R.S. Peters (1972) is:

> ...our concept of an educated person is of someone who is capable of delighting in a variety of pursuits and projects for their own sake and whose pursuit of them and general conduct of his life are transformed by some degree of all-

> round understanding and sensitivity. Pursuing the practical is not necessarily a disqualification for being educated; for the practical need not be pursued under a purely instrumental aspect. This does not mean, of course, that an educated man is oblivious to the instrumental value of pursuits – e.g. of science. It only means that he does not view them purely under this aspect. Neither does it mean that he has no specialised knowledge; it means only that he is not a narrow-minded specialist.

This is almost back to Newman and Pusey, and calls to mind those idyllic Chinese paintings of great cliffs and valleys and the tiny figures of a few scholars pursuing their civilised discourse amid the autumn mists. It is also reminiscent of the 'two cultures' debate. It is difficult to avoid the impression that the historian with no science, say, can be truly educated whereas the scientist with no history cannot.

As we have seen, three approaches in particular have tended to dominate views of the general nature of education, sometimes to such an extent that they are taken for granted: the pragmatic, the encyclopaedist and the essentialist. American education has largely adopted the first: students take what they need from the large menu available. The Humboldtian model was an encyclopaedist one. British attitudes are traditionally based, consciously or not, on an essentialist view: it is felt that universities, disciplines and educated individuals have some peculiar characteristics that make them what they are. A very clear example comes from the philosopher Michael Oakeshott, in *The Idea of a University* (1950). Instead of asking what are the aims or functions of a university, he says, we should ask, 'what universities are; or what they developed to be in the past; their knowledge of how to be a university... A university is a number of people engaged in a certain sort of activity...the Middle Ages called it Studium; we may call it "the pursuit of learning"'. It is also the place and the resources for this activity. Three classes of persons make up the people: scholars, scholars who teach and undergraduates. Scholars do not merely accumulate knowledge, but have a higher-order view about the nature of knowledge and their specialism, and an ability to distinguish what they know and what they do not know. Scholars who teach do so out of the virtue of their scholarship; they wish to impart what they know,

as distinct from instructors. As Oakeshott says, such a one 'will teach, not how to draw or paint, but how to see'. The mode of teaching resembles a conversation, which does not have a chairman, a predetermined course, an aim or a conclusion. 'Its integration is not predetermined, but springs from the quality of the voices which speak, and its value lies in the relics it leaves behind in the minds of those who participate'. As to the undergraduate, he, 'has come to seek his intellectual fortune', through, 'education in conversation with his teachers, his fellows and himself'. Education is not training for a trade or profession, or for service in society, or gaining a, 'moral and intellectual outfit to see him through life... The characteristic gift of a university is the gift of an interval', that is before, 'embarking on the business of life.' This is, 'the one thing that every university in Europe provides, in some measure, for its undergraduates':

> And what of the harvest? Nobody could go down from such a university unmarked. Intellectually, he may be supposed to have acquired some knowledge and, more important, a certain discipline of mind, a grasp of consequences, a greater command over his own powers. He will know, perhaps, that it is not enough to have a 'point of view', that what we need is thoughts. He will not go down in possession of an armoury of arguments to prove the truth of what he believes; but he will have acquired something that puts him beyond the reach of the intellectual hooligan, and whatever has been the subject of his study he may be expected to look for some meaning in the things that have greatly moved mankind. Perhaps he may even have found a centre for his intellectual affections. In short, this period at a university may not have equipped him very effectively to earn a living, but he will have learned something to help him to lead a more significant life. And morally – he will not have acquired an outfit of moral ideas, a new reach-me-down suit of moral clothing, but he will have had an opportunity to extend the range of moral sensibility, and he will have had the leisure to replace the clamorous and conflicting absolutes of adolescence with something less corruptible (Oakeshott 1950).

This Arcadian vision, clearly derived from 19th century Oxbridge, is ever more difficult to apply to a rapidly growing and changing student population. To the average university teacher, struggling to find time amid the demands of administration and

marking to grind out another publication, it will have a hollow ring, while for the average student it will be largely irrelevant; to be equipped to earn a living is precisely what he or she does want. This is not to say that Oakeshott's values are to be dismissed, rather that they cannot be taken for granted; if they are indeed desirable, for all students or for some, they must be planned for, perhaps in relation to much larger numbers. At the moment of writing, the training of barristers is being extended from its traditional home in the London Inns of Court to other parts of the country. But students will still have to come to London to eat their prescribed number of dinners in the company of their fellows and seniors. This is more than a quaint survival, it is an attempt to preserve the less tangible but real values of professional ethos. Whether it will succeed in an increasingly practically oriented age, or fall away as an anachronism, remains to be seen. Probably, something of Oakeshott's community of learning does exist in some universities; I believe it was to be glimpsed even in polytechnics. Dinners in hall are still possible for the small community of an Oxbridge college. A large, increasingly home-based, part-time, vocationally oriented former polytechnic may well give up the hope of anything comparable.

Another aspect of the debate over quality and values concerns the content of university education, that is, what the graduate ought to know. The implication is that a type of subject, or even a list of specific subjects, defines the 'quality' of higher education. Roger Scruton (*The Times*, 21 August 1996), for example, states: 'By holding on to the distinction between the university and the polytechnic, our educational system explicitly acknowledged the difference between disinterested learning and "relevance"'. It is difficult to think that this remark could be made by anyone actually familiar with the whole system, in which practically all forms of higher education were widely distributed. It might also be argued that it is precisely the false dichotomy between learning and relevance that has bedevilled us. The reality is of course that everything has always been changing; and that universities have nearly always been more or less concerned with vocations, whether these were the professions or the general business of management. This has been because these were the demands of the paying customers, whether

students or government. Even the Oxbridge colleges owed their original financial independence, which allowed the 'genuinely academic not vocational' view to flourish, to benefactors who wanted a specific job done; either a religious function or one of educating those in whom the donor was interested. As we have seen, the non-vocational view was largely formulated in the mid 19th century; and the formal polytechnic/university distinction invented, on dubious grounds, in the late 1960s. The argument over labels such as 'professor' and 'university' appears to be largely a red herring. Their meaning has always been diverse, and it continues to change. This is a natural property of living languages, and no one has ever discovered a way to halt it. It is unproductive to argue over what a label 'really' means. There are in fact two arguments about subject suitability: one that some subjects are essential, the other that some subjects are ruled out. The first is still debated in the USA under the heading of a 'core curriculum', the distant descendant of the mediaeval *trivium* and *quadrivium*, but has largely, although quite recently, been lost sight of here.

The origin of the tradition that universities should offer certain subjects, and not others, is probably mediaeval, reinforced by the later prominence of the classics. But the idea of some forms of knowledge being superior to others almost certainly owes much also to the Platonic (and more generally the classical Greek) theory of education. A tradesman or craftsman could never be truly educated under Plato's system, not just because he would not have time but because the occupation itself cramps the development of body and mind. The peak of education was to be a wise guardian, and the supreme educational value was reason. For the sophists, the goal was citizenship and the means primarily rhetoric. Neither put specific knowledge first. Once you do, starting with the mediaeval higher faculties leading to professions, it is difficult to avoid an open-ended list. Universities have perpetually widened their curricula, usually amid protests that the new subjects are not suitable.

It is helpful (in my view) to distinguish discipline, subject and profession. By 'discipline' I mean a set of problems that seem to belong together and the methods developed to investigate them; by 'subject' the organisation of knowledge, especially for purposes of dissemination – teaching, writing, examining etc; and

by 'profession' the set of people who engage in furthering and applying methods and knowledge. Confusingly, all three often carry the same label, such as law or music. It is clear, however, that they do not exactly correspond. 'Law' as a discipline has a characteristic methodology and body of knowledge, based on traditions but always changing. A degree in law will naturally draw largely on that discipline, but may also draw on others with their own characteristic focus, such as psychology or history. To confuse the issue still further, it is currently the case that the idea of a degree being 'in' anything is progressively disappearing with the adoption of modular programmes. Some 80 per cent of British universities have taken this route at least nominally, although usually not giving students an unfettered choice. Matters are further complicated by the fact that there is, at least in this country, a whole range of relationships between first degrees, employment and vocational/professional qualifications. In Barnett's (1988) terms, the operational aims of a course may be to produce a qualified professional (e.g. medicine), or a person equipped to enter specific professional training (e.g. law or psychology), or simply a generally educated person – in this case presumably operational and philosophical aims overlap. Even the (British) titles are confusingly inconsistent, so that for example a bachelor of medicine is a qualified physician and addressed as 'doctor', a title which dentists are currently also claiming though neither has any formal right to it; a barrister or solicitor may or may not have a first degree in law but hardly ever a higher one; chartered psychologists almost always have a first degree in psychology but must increasingly have a doctorate also, and so on.

Territorial rules about what may or may not be studied or practised are inappropriate for disciplines, just as are those imposed by religious or political ideology. It is the essence of scientific enquiry that it is unfettered. But territoriality is unavoidable in professions and in subjects. Few people would wish to be treated by an unqualified dentist or advised by an unqualified lawyer, and qualification implies the guarantee of a specific range of competence. Students must be clearly told what a syllabus contains (another mark of Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) courses), and examinations must be fairly representative of that syllabus. These simple procedures

are both morally right and educationally effective. There must be rules and structures, although they should not be allowed to persist without regular review (another CNAA requirement). Such rules should not apply to disciplines. Nevertheless disciplines can be distinguished one from another by the problems and methodology on which they focus. Independent disciplines can be considered as those studies that have established methods of enquiry and bodies of knowledge, and some kind of higher order philosophy as to what they are about. It is studies of this kind that are often felt to be appropriate to universities. There is a long history of attempts to classify disciplines, going back at least to Francis Bacon, and to show how they relate to each other, sometimes in hierarchical fashion. Both Jean Piaget and John Locke, for example, gave primacy to psychology as in some sense the most fundamental science, though for different reasons. Hirst (1974) considered disciplines, or groups of disciplines, as, 'subdivisions of distinct forms for knowledge: particular, institutionalised modes of conceptualising, exploring, and structuring human experience'. Each has its own key concepts, distinctive conceptual structure and criteria for truth or validity. Disciplines are held together by distinctive constellations of theories, concepts and methods. The distinct, fundamental forms of knowledge of which disciplines are subdivisions are, according to Hirst, mathematics, physical sciences, human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy. Even if some such taxonomy is accepted, however, university curricula must always be open to change and development as new disciplines establish themselves, giving rise to new subjects – courses, modules, etc. There are indeed qualitative differences between various things that can be learned, but it is much more contentious to try to divide them into two groups, one suitable for university study and the other not, or to arrange them in a hierarchy. And it is not at all clear that a particular institution should confine itself to certain subjects, merely because it has a certain title. It is unlikely that the general public, or employers, however fuzzy their notions of higher education, would confuse a degree in hotel management with one in mathematics.

A more powerful version of the essentialist approach is whether there are, or should be, characteristics over and above

demands which justify calling a form of education 'higher'; and, if so, whether these are intrinsically a part of certain disciplines and not others. We have noted the alternatives of reason and rhetoric in classical Greece, and this contrast is to be found clearly in the history of American education; less explicitly perhaps in ours. Currently the most frequently suggested candidate for such a value is some form of intellectual development – reason, in fact. Thus R.A. Barnett maintains that higher education, 'is essentially a matter of the development of the mind of the individual student'. But not just any development: 'An educational process can be termed higher education when the student is carried on to levels of reasoning which make possible critical reflection on his or her experiences, whether consisting of propositional learning or of knowledge through action' (Barnett 1990). He argues that, historically, the idea of higher education has carried an emancipatory dimension, focused on freeing the student's mind through the acquisition of objective knowledge in an institution relatively independent of the wider society and where academic freedom is assured. This will no longer serve, Barnett maintains, because the concept of objective knowledge is no longer accepted without question and because higher education is now incorporated into the modern state. Accordingly, 'legitimation of higher education must be sought in the development of the student's critical competence, so as to understand and assess the framework within which education exists. In short, the legitimation of higher education resides in the idea of higher education as metacriticism' (Barnett 1985). Two or three decades of personal experience might lead one to conclude that, if this is really so, there is not all that much higher education about. Even the ablest of my former students, now highly distinguished in their profession, have applied their powers of criticism, I think, mainly to the issues of that profession rather than to the framework of education. And the large mass of students have been mainly concerned to pass examinations. Of course, those examinations usually look for something besides lists of facts, such as weighing evidence and rational argument, but not usually applied in the broader context implied by Barnett. More often, something like 'rationality' or 'critical thinking' is put at the top of the higher education agenda with no particular reference to context. This is probably most

explicit in the USA where, consistently with the data already quoted, it is asserted: 'Hardly a college or university in the nation would fail to identify the development of critical thinking as a vital outcome of its core curriculum'. The obvious steps have been taken to assess such development reliably and systematically by instruments such as the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (Facione *et al.* 1995). I am not aware of anything comparable in this country, where most institutions rely on the ancient system of examiners' judgement.

On an 'encyclopaedist' model, on the other hand, it would be argued that to be truly educated requires some understanding of all the distinct forms of knowledge, whatever they are taken to be. Ortega y Gasset (1946), for example, regarded university education as involving on the one hand the teaching of the learned professions, and on the other scientific research and the preparation of future investigators. But there is also a residue of 'general culture' which, in the mediaeval period (he says) constituted the whole of education (actually, it was only the foundation arts course). It was, however, 'the system of ideas concerning the world and humanity, which the man of the time possessed. It was, consequently, the repertory of convictions which became the effective guide of his existence', in a word, 'culture'. The modern university has almost entirely abandoned this function. In particular, he argues, the emphasis on 'enquiry', research, has been disastrous; it has led to the elimination of what ought to be the prime concern, namely culture, and has also distracted from the necessary business of training professionals. What a university ought to provide is a general education which as a basis or minimum would include what is absolutely necessary for future life, and is learnable by the average student. This, according to Ortega, would result in a curriculum covering the physical scheme of the world (physics), the fundamental themes of organic life (biology), the historical process of the human species (history), the structure and functioning of social life (sociology), and the plan of the universe (philosophy).

Historically, some disciplines have been considered superior to others for various reasons, such as revelation, effectiveness or accumulated prestige. In a strict religious context the Quran or the Bible may take precedence over other forms of learning. In

China for many centuries knowledge of the classical texts was thought to be the appropriate preparation for high office. In Western culture the classical languages have had a particular place. For the early Greeks, Homer was the Bible, Shakespeare, history and legends in one. Greek was essential to any educated Roman both because of the cultural achievements of Greece and because language gave access to the literature. In mediaeval times Latin became crucial as the international language of scholarship, diplomacy and government. As late as 1806 the Court of Chancery declared that an endowed *grammar* school was meant to teach the classical languages, and Latin ceased to be compulsory for entry to Oxford only in 1961. The prestige of the Western classical languages has probably contributed to the feeling that a 'real' education is somehow more arts- than science-based. C. Northcote Parkinson (1958), in what is now almost itself a neglected classic, satirised the British principle brilliantly:

> It was assumed that classical learning and literary ability would fit any candidate for any administrative post. It was assumed (no doubt rightly) that a scientific education would fit a candidate for nothing – except, possibly, science... Men thus selected on their classical performance were then sent forth to govern India. Those with lower marks were retained to govern England. Those with still lower marks were rejected altogether or sent to the colonies.

It is common to find writers even in the 'quality' press pronouncing on human affairs with all the certainty of a degree in literature or the arts and in sublime ignorance of the scientific knowledge that is readily available. It is difficult to avoid an impression that, in the UK at least, a general cultural education, loosely deriving from the classical tradition, is somehow thought superior to a scientific one. Latin and Greek are no longer the common medium of civilised life, however, nor the basis of higher education. The world-wide practicality of English has not given it a corresponding prestige. And as far as professions go, medicine invariably comes at the top in any list of desirable qualities (prestige, career prospects, value to society etc), followed by law, as studies by Leonard Holdstock and myself over a decade show (Radford 1985; Radford and Holdstock 1997). John of Salisbury would not be surprised. The third

of the mediaeval 'higher faculties', theology, has dropped out of the picture except for a minority.

Aristotle, to go back to a classic, distinguished three types of enquiry: broadly, theoretical or truth seeking; moral or good seeking; and technical pursuits or productive arts. As we have seen, universities began by concentrating on the third group – professional training – with some elements of the first and, in the case of theology, the second. Later, in this country at least, the first two became dominant and the third was devalued. For many Oxbridge dons in the 19th century, moral purpose became paramount. Gradually research (truth seeking) has come to supplant it, and the current view of most interested parties, at least in this country, puts research at the top, followed by training and preparation for careers, while moral issues, including such public aspects as service to the community and citizenship, are generally disregarded as aims of a university.

It has been in particular the upgrading of polytechnics that has precipitated the debate about quantity and quality in the UK (as is seen in the remarks of Mary Warnock and Roger Scruton – there are many other similar views). It is possible to suggest that this is not just because of the sharp increase in numbers of universities, and thus of university students and university teachers (and professorial titles), but also because of an underlying assumption about achievement itself, as being essentially qualitative rather than quantitative. Since the fundamental work of Francis Galton (1822–1911), however, we have learned that human differences can be systematically measured and compared by the science of psychometrics. We have also learned that such differences are in practically every case continuously distributed. They do not fall into neat, distinctly separated groups or classes. This approach was applied quite early to the diagnosis of children with learning difficulties, but higher education, at least in the UK, has been slower to profit from it. Rather there has been an underlying assumption that 'quality' is something apart from, and not necessarily reflected in, mere performance. Traditionally, degree classes have been regarded as qualitatively distinct and their award has had a large subjective element. The UGC in its report for the quinquennium 1930–35 asked: 'When the new graduate puts on the gown and hood of his degree, of what inward and spiritual qualities are these the

outward and visible signs?'. It is reminiscent of the religious doctrine of salvation by faith, not works; graduates are clearly among the elect, who are generally few. Currently the Higher Education Quality Council is enquiring into the nature of 'graduateness'. There are echoes of the classical Greek 'virtue', and more strongly of the values of the Oxford movement. An obituarist in *The Times* wrote on the death of Lord Grey of Fallodon in 1933: 'To say of a man that it matters less what he did than what he was conveys a high kind of tribute' (reprinted 8 September 1995). This is precisely the aristocratic argument: W.S. Gilbert's peers in *Iolanthe*, in good King George's golden days, 'did nothing in particular, and did it very well.' In reality, 'Britain won her proudest bays' by many exceptional achievements, large and small, not by masterly inactivity. Achievement can be assessed quantitatively, and this is one step towards understanding it and developing it.

It is perhaps not inappropriate to compare the methods of team selection in Britain and the USA. In the latter country, as is well known, Olympic athletes (for example) are chosen by a simple performance measure: trials are held and the first three in each event form the national team, even if number four is currently world champion. It contrasts with the agonies of decision over selection seen in British sport, above all in the most traditional, cricket – endless debate over, first of all, appointment of the selectors, and then over the 'class' and form of the players. (At the moment of writing, of the 36 top-averaging players in the country, only one is in the national team, which has just been comprehensively beaten by Pakistan.) The USA came easily first in the 1996 Olympic gold medals table; Britain was 35th with one. In athletics events, there can be only one gold medal winner. But there can be many different events; and it is also clear that any one of today's Olympic athletes (for example) would have been a winner in past decades. The general standard has risen, and far greater numbers are achieving. This surely must be the hope for education. This is not the place to pursue the complex debate about the relative contribution of 'nature' and 'nurture' (of which education is one component) to human abilities and achievement. It is quite clear that potential of almost all kinds has a more or less substantial inherited element, but it must develop through interaction with the environment,

physical and social. Research shows us a great deal about how to improve the latter. More, properly managed, ought to mean better, not worse; better overall and higher peaks attained; more good graduates and more Nobel prizes (which Britain, after an impressive record, has virtually ceased to win). In this sense, quantity and quality are complementary, not antagonistic.

Particularly under the impetus of the CNAA (in the UK) it has become usual to specify aims and objectives for individual courses or programmes. Barnett (1988) distinguishes philosophical aims, which are the educational ends a process must serve if it is to count as education, and operational aims, which are the desired results or products. Objectives may be considered as specific, preferably measurable, outcomes. They can be considered as statements about a student that are true at the end of (and because of) an educational programme that were not true at the beginning. Sometimes possible objectives are summarised as 'knowing, doing and being', or as knowledge, skills and experiences. Of these, knowledge has come to be the dominant objective of university courses, and above all knowledge of one particular type, theory-based, propositional and cognitive, traditionally claiming to be objective, value-free and explicit – more-or-less, in a word, 'scientific'. It is this that university examinations (and their derivatives at lower levels) have predominantly – though far from universally – sought to assess. Skills are also taught and assessed, especially of course the technical skills of a discipline; 'transferable' skills are increasingly specifically incorporated into higher education programmes. 'Being' variables, such as personality characteristics, are only seldom objectively assessed, although they regularly figure in references when the graduate applies for jobs. They are not so often considered as something that can be taught, although at other times, as we have seen, this was taken for granted. The sophists saw a direct link between skills and character, while the classical tutorial system shaped personality more by experience and example.

However, as we have seen, neither the main consumers nor the paymasters of higher education particularly wish to produce educated persons. If universities include such aims in their mission statements, they must either find ways of incorporating them into their programme of (more or less) practically oriented

qualifications, or end up with a list of unregarded platitudes. Apologists for individual disciplines do often claim unique virtues for them: for example, that history, 'is the only subject that makes you grow up and takes you past adolescence' (Sir Geoffrey Elton, quoted in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 17 January 1986) or the ancient claim that Latin 'trains the mind'. Positive evidence is hard to come by, perhaps the reason why such protagonists do not bother much with it. There have been some attempts to see whether, for example, teaching an understanding of statistical laws improves the ability to reason about everyday problems – with, in this case, positive results. But it is extremely hard to disentangle the effects of studying a particular discipline from the student's other activities, both curricular and extra-curricular, and, indeed, from the qualities that students bring with them to the university. It can be assumed that every discipline involves some acquisition of content; that is, the minimum assessed for degree purposes. Generally also, anything more than a bare pass requires reasoning about what has been learned and applying it to particular problems. If these are done well enough, a top class degree is awarded. Less often is there any formal assessment of more general skills, personal qualities, attitudes and so on; although it would be perfectly possible to do this, were it considered desirable.

What works in higher education

In the past few decades there has been a very substantial increase in reliable research into the processes of higher education. Drawing on this and on well-established principles of individual and collective behaviour, as well as the experience of successful educators over the centuries, we can be pretty clear about how to achieve success – assuming, of course, that we know what are our aims. One of the first principles, indeed, is precisely to be clear about what is to be achieved; one of the lessons the CNAA experience helped to make explicit. Sometimes, to be sure, the lesson was not well understood, and course programmes were prefixed with lists of 'aims and objectives' which were vague, unattainable or irrelevant. This is also all too often true of the more general mission statements and the like now produced by universities. Ideally, however, and it is quite often achieved,

both teachers and students should be clear about what is to be done and why. I have often remarked that a student is entitled to ask at any point, 'why are you telling me this?' or 'why do I have to do this?'. Answers of the type, 'because it is in the syllabus', or 'because it is something that interests me', are not satisfactory, although a related sort of answer, 'because I judge it to be important in the context of mastering this discipline or entering this profession, for which you have signed up' may be a good one if it can be justified. They are not satisfactory in the first instance simply because they do not work well as a matter of experience. But the reason for this is that they are educationally unsound. By this I mean at least two things. One is that, as ample research demonstrates, understanding is a more effective basis for learning than rote memory. One does not have to be an idealist to accept this simple scientific fact. The other thing, however, is by way of an ideal, namely a concept of education as something differing from training. This distinction has often been made, sometimes on intellectual, sometimes on moral or religious or other grounds. My own view is not particularly original, although it is far from as generally accepted as may sometimes be assumed. It holds that in education an 'open society', as Popper had it, is superior to a closed one. The educational ideal is essentially in the tradition of the rational, responsible, autonomous individual. This does rest on certain assumptions, although I think a convincing case can be made for these, based on both evidence and argument: assumptions, for example, that human beings in general are intrinsically neither good nor bad but have the potential to develop satisfactorily given favourable conditions. There is not space to explore in detail what such a simplistic statement is intended to convey. I would take it, again as an example, that it is more desirable to promote the health and happiness of others than to injure them. And I would take it that this trait is more likely to be salient in some circumstances rather than others, although it is not always clear just what these are for the individual. Saints do emerge from terrible upbringings and sinners from apparently fortunate ones, at least materially. But in general there is good reason to prefer a structure which actively fosters behaviour thought to be desirable. Such a structure will include examples and role models, explicit (technical) explanation and guidance, personal

support and encouragement, opportunity for practice and achievement, esteem and reward for success. These are the very well-established conditions for the highest individual achievement in any sphere, as research continues to show more and more clearly.

An essential mark and condition of such achievement is that it is the behaviour of an independent, rational person. Every good sports coach, however brilliant his technique and subtle his psychology, knows that in the end it is the player who will determine the ultimate level of achievement; the coach's role is to provide the conditions. Moral behaviour does not consist in doing what you are told by teacher or preacher, but in deciding for yourself. To be a good teacher in any sphere implies wanting the pupil to become more capable of acting independently. Such a capacity can be developed only in exercising it. Rather simply, abilities of all kinds, whether physical, intellectual or moral, work on much the same principles. Use, practice, understanding and learning go together. In education, as perhaps elsewhere, ends do not justify unrelated means; ends and means cannot be divorced. Structure should serve function, not the other way about. Modules, courses, departments, universities themselves, have no merit except in so far as they carry out the functions for which they were created. If these include learning, then they should promote the activities of those engaged in it, that is, students. No body-builder would imagine that any progress was possible without regular, planned and intensive exercise; no runner would forego a practice schedule, of which, in a sense, the actual race is merely the last phase. You can't actually learn to swim by reading a book on the way to the pool – nor, on the other hand, by being thrown in at the deep end, a favourite formula with some. (I recall being told by my former Director: 'If you want a student to learn something, you don't tell him what to do! You let him make mistakes and find out for himself!'. Wrong.) Similarly the ability to act responsibly entails really doing so; as in the physical cases, of course in a series of graduated exercises. Exactly the same with cognitive skills. If your intention is to develop 'critical thinking', then that should be an explicit objective, and the programme should include the theory, practice and assessment of such thinking. It will not do to teach subject content and assume that the desired critical

ability will somehow emerge also. One must teach what one wishes to be learned. It is not effective, with new students, simply to set an essay topic, perhaps with a list of references, with no explanation of what kind of a task this is and what is expected. Nor is it effective to give a detailed exposition of, say, library resources, before there is any experience of a need for such resources. Neither is it maximally effective to teach, or learn, the minimum necessary for assessment. Not only is it not very educational, but it is always liable to fail when the question is not quite what had been anticipated or, in more general terms, when the need is to apply rather than merely reproduce. Such points may seem obvious platitudes, but I have very frequently seen them ignored.

Such considerations lead me to suggest three principles or factors for the effective development of higher education, which may also perhaps help to balance the competing demands of quantity and quality. They can be summarised as autonomy, diversity and professionalism. Each of these can be applied to institutions of higher education, to the teaching staff within them, and to the students. Institutions, staff and students are likely to be most effective, to begin with, in conditions of considerable freedom. Complete freedom, of course, is probably a logical, and certainly a practical, impossibility. All must act within the law, and further constraints are imposed by finance, public accountability, requirements for validation and so on. It is a matter of balance. But what appears to be the case is that freedom is in most cases being ever more rapidly reduced. As far as universities are concerned, this has been a centuries old battle, as we have seen. In many countries, including the UK, universities retained a considerable degree of autonomy through successive political changes until very recently; government has come, well within the last hundred years, to pay the piper and is now calling the tune. Ironically, in a sense, this is at a time when it is apparent that the bill is simply far too high to be met from central resources. It can be argued, indeed, that this presents a golden opportunity to break out of the spiral of ever-closer control of resources. When it comes to quality control, the traditional device of the external examiner, which served well for over a century, is in difficulties though there may still be life in it, as discussed in Part II. But there are certainly

other and much superior ways than the outdated and discredited inspectorial system recently instituted: for example, the interactive, co-operative model developed successfully by the CNAA, the approach adopted in the USA or the self-assessment mentioned in Part II. Howarth (1993) spells out with great clarity both the shortcomings of the present arrangements and the characteristics of better ones. More generally, it should not be forgotten (as it was by the Robbins Committee) that in the USA many of the most prestigious, highest quality institutions, the Harvards and Yales, remain private, independent corporations; as Oxford and Cambridge were until the 1920s. Many countries see no problem with a dual system of public and private higher education.

Academic staff work best in conditions of considerable autonomy. In the USA the Humboldtian principle of 'freedom to teach' combined with a modular organisation, has led to individuals having more or less complete control over content, teaching and examining. This is generally welcomed, though there are also disadvantages, such as lack of comparability and possible bias in assessment. And there, as elsewhere, it is the working conditions that are being progressively tightened in various ways. In the UK there has traditionally existed the possibility, even in the old 'public' sector, of academics doing very little for their salary. The current answer is to impose more rules about hours and attendance. Good teaching and research, however, cannot be ensured by enforcing hours. There are rewards for research, such as promotion and prestige, but very few for teaching. However, it is not really a question of the stick versus the carrot for the donkey; donkeys will never make good teachers or researchers. What is needed, rather, is the selection of those who have the appropriate motivation and potential, and the creation of enabling circumstances. Part of this, as far as teaching is concerned, would indeed be a radical shift in attitude to make that activity as valued as research – with practical consequences for promotion and other rewards such as time off, travel and so on. Equally important is real individual and collective decision-making on academic matters (somehow avoiding endless meetings), and the encouragement of individual initiative in teaching. Much of this comes down to the attitudes of top management and the day-to-day activity of middle management – heads of depart-

ments and the equivalent. It might almost be summed up in the one word 'respect' – which does not mean automatic acceptance. (Again I recall a response of my former Director, to whom I had been urging the desirability of academic 'democracy': 'Of course we must be democratic! But that doesn't mean having a committee and letting them decide. B**** to that! It means deciding what to do and making the committee agree!'. I think I learned quite a lot from him about how not to do things.)

One extreme version of student autonomy in academic matters is the 'cafeteria' version of the modular system, that is, a completely free choice of modules. One disadvantage of this is an incoherent individual programme. Another is the cost of trying to avoid the incoherence by ample counselling. Another version is the 'independent study' model in which each student works out an individual programme, including the form of assessment, so that the whole course is rather like a large student project. My own observation of this in action (at North East London Polytechnic) suggested that it works well for a small minority. These are extreme versions of the 'pragmatic' viewpoint; and it can be argued indeed that the university years should be marked by concentration and intensity, on enthusiasms and striving for mastery, not on an impossible 'well-rounded' ideal – as Bissell (1968) put it, 'middle age is the time to be spherical'. There is also a case for students having something to identify with; this can contribute both to intellectual and personal development. This 'something' may be an organisation such as an Oxbridge-type college; in a large amorphous university it is more likely to be a discipline such as history or classics, or a future profession such as law or medicine; it may be an organisation linked to one of these, such as a department or a school (in the USA, fraternities serve a similar purpose). Most students require some kind of structure for their university life and learning, based on the knowledge and experience which they do not have by definition, but which their teachers should. In the simplest form, this is provided by a clear course plan. But there are structures that foster autonomy and others that inhibit it. Given that most students have a more or less explicit aim to gain a useful qualification, and that they are necessarily learners, a structure is needed that leads by graduated steps to mastery, with increasing opportunity for choice and decision-making.

The traditional 'project' in psychology and other subjects is a good example. They don't work if students have a first year of prescribed experimental work and then are suddenly required to 'think of a project' – it is a skill which has to be learned, step by step, with encouragement and guidance at each point. This is not always the case.

Diversity has, in reality, always been a feature of universities, even in Britain where English, Scottish and Irish variants existed from the start, as was shown in Part I. Even before the upgrading of polytechnics, no one ever really supposed that an education at Bangor was the same thing as one at Balliol. The present nearly 200 institutions offering degree work present a bewildering variety. A recent report suggests that four main groups of universities are emerging. One is the 'traditional/elite' which continues to take students straight from school, has little vocational orientation in first degrees, and will grow mainly in postgraduate and professional development work. Then there are those which would perhaps prefer to be in the first group but are having to develop regional and vocational strategies and consequently are in some conflict as to their role. A third group consists mainly of the former polytechnics which desire the prestige of the older universities and seek to emulate them, while at the same time trying to attract a much broader range of students. Finally there are those that are positively innovative, with a local, vocational and teaching-based policy (Institute of Employment Studies 1996). One of the major policy issues is whether there should be any formal recognition of such differences, or whether to continue with the present system of supposed equality. Some have proposed, at least for research, that since it is clearly impossible to fund this adequately in all universities simultaneously, there should be a kind of football league system, with promotion and relegation dependent on performance. This would hardly answer in respect of teaching, where one would wish quality to be maintained at least at a standard of adequacy for all students; but it is rather a question of which students are taught and for what purpose. Despite the popular belief, there is little evidence of a direct link between staff research and good teaching, certainly at basic levels (Hattie and Marsh 1996). Academic staff fight for research because of their own intellectual interests and in order to move up the

system. There would have to be radical changes to attain, for example, something like the American system described by Clark Kerr, with students going first to a local university offering some kind of foundation courses (transferable skills and knowledge, perhaps a little more rhetoric to balance the reason), and then having an option to go further both academically and geographically. One can even conceive that the local institution might also be a specialised one in some areas of advanced study. Many universities are actively developing graduate schools somewhat on an American model. This could well be accompanied by a recognition that admission to such a school need not depend on the traditional single subject honours degree (an informal enquiry in my own profession revealed that there was very little specific knowledge, apart from methodology, that professional course tutors actually expected of their intake). It is hard to see why diversity should destroy excellence, as seems to be feared by some.

The need for a diversity of both students and teachers hardly needs arguing. As has been pointed out, the first follows inevitably from expansion; but it is also clear that greater variety is going to be needed, and demanded, assuming that society continues to grow more complex and technology advances. One of the traditional merits of the English system has been that it has accommodated a variety of teachers, extending even to eccentricity. Oddities such as Charles Dodgson and Oscar Browning were almost commonplace a century ago. It has often not been a formal requirement for a university teacher to have a degree in the subject to be taught or even in anything at all; certainly no qualification in teaching has been looked for. Such variety, at least in a relatively small, intimate collegiate setting, increases the chances of the individual student finding something that suits him or her – although with some risk of the opposite. Moreover, territoriality is inappropriate to disciplines; scholarly and scientific enquiry must be free to lead anywhere and make use of all knowledge. Qualifications are irrelevant. As teaching becomes a mass activity, however, professionalism becomes important, indeed crucial, even if it entails an increase in regulation.

It has been pointed out (e.g. by David Warren Piper 1994), that academic staff are in a curious position professionally, owing

allegiance on the one hand to a discipline, and on the other to an institution and occupation. Until very recently, British academic staff have typically possessed a first degree as an indicator of ability in a particular discipline, to which has increasingly been added, during the last 50 years or so, a PhD as a qualification in research. Teaching ability has been left to chance; the term 'teacher' to university staff has meant 'schoolteacher'. Nor has it been thought necessary to train for other components of academic life such as counselling, administration or public relations.

The question of exactly what constitutes a profession is itself not agreed; there is no legal definition of one, at least in the UK. The *OED* states: 'vocation, calling, esp. one that involves some form of learning or science, as the learned professions (divinity, law, medicine)' – our old friends. Perkin (1987) gives six criteria of a profession: intellectual education and training; skills based on theoretical knowledge; fiduciary service in the interests of others; the assessment and certification of competence; the exclusion of the unqualified; and a code of conduct. Of these, only the first has traditionally been generally true, while the second only applies to the research role. None of the others has been adopted. Warren Piper suggests four criteria: members share a body of knowledge; professional identity is for life; professionals are accountable for the effects of what they do rather than for the actions they take; and professional bodies restrict access and enforce codes of conduct. Academics clearly do not share a body of knowledge, in fact different disciplines frequently find it impossible to communicate. Individuals may become and cease to be academics at different stages in a career (often while continuing to identify themselves as a lawyer, a historian, etc.) Access and practice may be controlled within a particular discipline, but not in academia as a whole. The remaining criterion is in fact that of autonomy, which should not be confused with unaccountability; indeed self-regulation, with appropriate external validation, is one of the marks of a mature profession. It is not professional to be unable, or unwilling, to state and defend the grounds for decisions – such as marks awarded.

There are different models of professional development. In this country, such development has tended to be led by independent corporations of the practitioners themselves, partly of

course because of the peculiar circumstances which caused Oxford and Cambridge to lose their professional training role. In the USA the universities have often taken a lead in the creation of professions, although perhaps less effectively in their own case. In many other countries, the creation and regulation of professions has been a matter for central government. A fairly typical example of the British mode is seen in the case of the British Psychological Society. Beginning as a small group of interested persons, it has progressively introduced membership grades with entry qualifications, has established its own examining procedures and standards (also used as a yardstick to check other qualifications of intending members, generally university degrees), has created through parliamentary legislation a register of qualified practitioners who adhere to a code of conduct, and has obtained the authority of a Royal Charter. Currently it is seeking further legislation to control the use of the title 'psychologist'. It has also gradually developed a formal system of professional accreditation which involves a first degree, principally in 'basic' psychology, followed by a professional/applied higher degree (a doctorate is becoming the norm). A major step towards establishing such a pattern for teaching has been the creation of a diploma for teachers of psychology (at any level), who apply their discipline to that activity just as others do to clinical, occupational or other work.

These developments have been driven, as they usually are, by the desire to protect both the public from charlatans and the profession from competitors. Academics have not, as a body, felt the same motivation. Perkin (1987) suggests that they 'have failed to ensure the worth of what they have to offer, or to market it effectively, relying too much on 'effortless superiority', no doubt partly one more Oxbridge legacy. They are split as between different kinds of institutions, different levels of prestige (and salary), and different specialisms and departments. Whether all this can be overcome is doubtful; currently there are at least rudimentary attempts to introduce some form of training, and some organisations (such as the Staff and Educational Development Association) are urging the cause of 'professionalism'. There are dangers in professionalism: they are those of the closed shop, over-rigid control, inertia, arrogance and self-interest. These are found in the most developed professions,

such as law and medicine, but they are avoidable, and in the end most people would rather rely on qualified practitioners than the alternative. In the case of academics, the relatively leisured, gentlemanly role, so far as it existed, is no longer an option. Belloc's 'remote and ineffectual Don' was, after all, supported by a private corporation which could do much as it liked and had few legal duties even towards its students. It is now a question of being professionals or proletariat – the 'workers in the knowledge factories' seen by Smyth (1995) and others – a tendency in which some academics at least have themselves colluded, misguidedly and really rather shockingly (to me), adopting the stance of trade unions, talking of workers and management and actually going on strike to the detriment of their own students. Professionalism means responsibility as well as privilege.

The professional model is applicable to the universities themselves. It was, as has been pointed out, their original pattern, like that of the mediaeval guilds they resembled – guilds, even in trades, were much more like professional organisations than trade unions. Some characteristics of the independent, 'professional' corporation have been retained by universities, but they are rapidly being eroded – financial control, self-regulation and so on. The old ways had certainly led to a degree of self-satisfaction, but as with the individual member of staff, the answer is not more detailed control but effective encouragement of self-development.

Exactly the same applies to students. What students primarily want from a university, as we have seen, is a useful qualification. In getting it, they also want to 'grow up' in more general ways. These aims are entirely laudable and appropriate, and they are consistent with becoming 'professional'. Professional preparation must involve both general and specialised knowledge, skills and experience. An important aspect of professionalism is not merely command of a range of techniques, but the skill to choose the most appropriate, and to know how far one's expertise extends and where to turn when the limits are reached. All this implies more than a narrow range of technical knowledge. It also implies attaining a degree of mastery of a particular discipline, considered as a coherent body of expertise applied to a related set of problems. It implies, too, some personal identi-

fication with, and commitment to, a discipline and/or a related profession; and (thus) at least some period at which this is something that is worth the best of which one is capable. Fortunately, but far from accidentally, all these things are also educationally extremely sound. They are also attainable, to a reasonable degree, within the present framework of university education, given the will to change, perhaps quite radically, many attitudes and structures. They should not be sacrificed for the sake of a largely spurious 'flexibility'.

In *Helping Students to Learn* (with K. Raaheim and J.A. Wankowski 1991), I tried to summarise the main points from a large research literature on effective means of teaching and learning, and I shall not reiterate this; subsequent research reinforces what was said there. One reviewer, doubtless under pressures resulting from increasing quantity, suggested that my advocacy of quality in teaching was unrealistic and out of date. I do not think this is so, if one considers the essence rather than the particular techniques. For example, it is clear that personal contact, guidance and encouragement are powerful factors in successful learning. This has been so from the wise centaur Cheiron onwards and is attested by the experience of disciples and gurus, students and tutors, and sports champions and coaches, as well as by research. The same or similar effects can be obtained, in principle, even when numbers of students become large. One approach might be to adopt tutorial teaching as the staple instead of lectures, perhaps in the first year (when it is probably most needed). Given an agreed foundation curriculum, one member of staff could reasonably handle, say, five or six groups of five or six students, seeing each for half a day per week to guide their work for the remainder. Allow another half-day for individual appointments, and there still remain three or four half-days for research and administration (even assuming that academics work only office hours, which is seldom true). If these students had no other formal tuition, the student–staff ratio would be around 30 to 1. Another approach is to make use of recent graduates as teaching assistants, as in the USA, or any more advanced students as mentors. The first has been resisted here, presumably on the grounds of diluting quality and reducing salaries. Of course such assistants have to be properly prepared, but then both they and their students can gain much from

the system, as described in Part III; and more economical is just what a system will need to be. There are many other ways of creating the effect of personal contact, both formal and informal. A system of student representatives within a department is an example of a formal structure, which, however, requires some staff effort to ensure that it really works and is not allowed to lapse. Informally, it is again a matter of attitude: there are numerous *ad hoc* ways of quietly encouraging helpful activities. It is possible to address even a large group of students personally or impersonally (much can be learned from watching good actors, or even better great comedians such as Ken Dodd or Max Miller). It is possible to explain to students why things are done and where they stand, or leave them to find out for themselves. The first is better. My personal experience is that when I habitually kept my office door open, and/or gave instructions that any student was to be admitted immediately if I was not actually engaged, I was not in practice overwhelmed by callers, but I think, although I cannot prove, that some good came of the perceived accessibility. As a Head of Department I found it useful to wander round quite a lot, to see and be seen and to chat. This was rather time-consuming, but possible if the paperwork is not allowed to dominate; and it is only one way of working. Most people have at least some break in the day to eat or drink; this can be done in one's room, or in a staff dining room or external venue; or in somewhere accessible to all – it's the practical version of dining in Hall. It is, I am convinced, not merely the actual contact that is important, but the attitude that such availability indicates. All such arrangements do depend on commitment, and on having at least adequate physical and administrative resources.

Again, many of the technical characteristics of good teaching are not related to student numbers: such basics as good presentation, organisation and subject mastery – matters which should form part of professional teaching but are still often left to chance. The whole process of assessment of students, for entry and for awards, is currently quite uninformed by the ample and well-established knowledge that is available. The inevitable results are avoidable drop-out rates and randomly inaccurate examinations (e.g. Newstead 1996). Professionalism implies mastery of technique as well as of knowledge, a mastery which

is assessed and formally certificated and is subject to periodic review and continual development. It also implies autonomy in what is done, combined with openness of operation to peers and others. It generally implies 'hands-on' responsibility: a surgeon may be supported by a large team, but must operate personally and be accountable for the whole process. This could be the model for a senior academic, head of a 'firm' of teaching, or research and administrative assistants, who do not carry out all the expert roles, but make their chief maximally effective. There is a case for a more hierarchical structure rather than the theoretically egalitarian one in which every member of staff does their own thing and fights for time for their specialisms. This may work well in a small community of scholars, but in large teaching institutions the only alternative is likely to be imposed non-academic management. Moreover, the egalitarian approach tends to mean that everyone takes a share of everything, without assistance, so that the best teachers and the most productive researchers are lumbered with administration, while everyone is called on to do a bit of every form of teaching, whereas in fact some may be far better at, say, tutorials or group work, and others at large lectures. (Or even worse. Another bit of advice I was given regularly, if I suggested that a member of staff was becoming a passenger, was, 'give him more teaching!' – a simple recipe for disaster.) But all this needs to be self-regulated, so as to be flexible in response to changing demands and the needs of staff development. Academic staff will not benefit by being typecast, but they may gain from a degree of specialisation. There are many obstacles to such a pattern, such as the existing management, traditional ways of working, salary structures, and the still predominant role of research in academic prestige and promotion.

Ideally, one would wish to take from other systems of higher education, and from any other sources, what seems to have value for us, at the same time learning to avoid that which has not worked well. Too often this knowledge seems to be either unfamiliar or ignored, and the same mistakes are repeated needlessly or the wheel painstakingly re-invented. The Greek sophists developed what we now call 'transferable skills', in the service of effective citizenship. Both, in modern form, are needed now. Mediaeval universities took the skills further, and

added professionalism, intellectual rigour and the model of an integrated, self-regulating corporation. Nineteenth century Oxbridge evolved an admirable ideal of the benefits of a general cultural education and of the duties that such a privilege carries; but unfortunately this was accompanied by a misleading assumption that 'real' education is somehow divorced from real life and does not involve actually learning to do anything specific. As a method, the Oxbridge-style close personal relationship of tutor and student has at its best been among the most effective systems of teaching. The civic universities began to cater for local needs, and to draw on local support. Much later the polytechnics continued this, developed newer methods of personal concern for students and, together with the CNAA, flexibility, explicit aims, openness and co-operative peer accountability. The Open University, following on from the long tradition of external studies especially of the University of London, has had great success with non-traditional teaching methods and maintaining motivation at a distance – and with very large numbers. Elsewhere, the French *grandes écoles* promoted a concept of intellectual excellence; the Humboldtian university that of intellectual freedom. In the USA we see diversity of public and private provision, of level and type of institution, combined with flexibility and wide access, and with the opportunity to reach the highest levels of academic excellence. Higher education generally has been slow to benefit from research findings and experience in other fields, which show quite clearly how both teachers and students may be most effective. Very little use is yet made of psychometrics, which gives us powerful and reliable methods of assessing the input and output of higher education, greatly superior to the present haphazard muddle.

Personally, what I would wish to see as the product of higher education might be called the 'educated professional': practical, high level skills combined with wider awareness (educational, cultural, and so on), personal autonomy and social responsibility. We need both values and practicality, and we need them for more of the population; we need both quantity and quality. I daresay some may remark, oh, well that's what we all want, isn't it? This is not so. It is not what the rather numerous totalitarian regimes, religious and political, want; it is not what our own 'democratic' governments want. It is not what academics gen-

erally want, nor even students and their parents, whose explicit aims are more limited. In line with what has been said above, it would be entirely self-defeating to hope that such ideals could ever be imposed. They can come about only through the process of education itself, to which it is hoped the present volume may make some small contribution. But it would be equally negative to drift along with the tide, trying vainly to provide for vastly increased numbers a cut-price, off-the-shelf version of what was once an elite education of a particular specialised kind.

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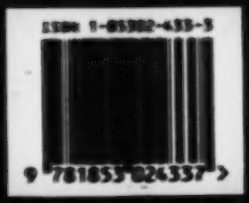

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